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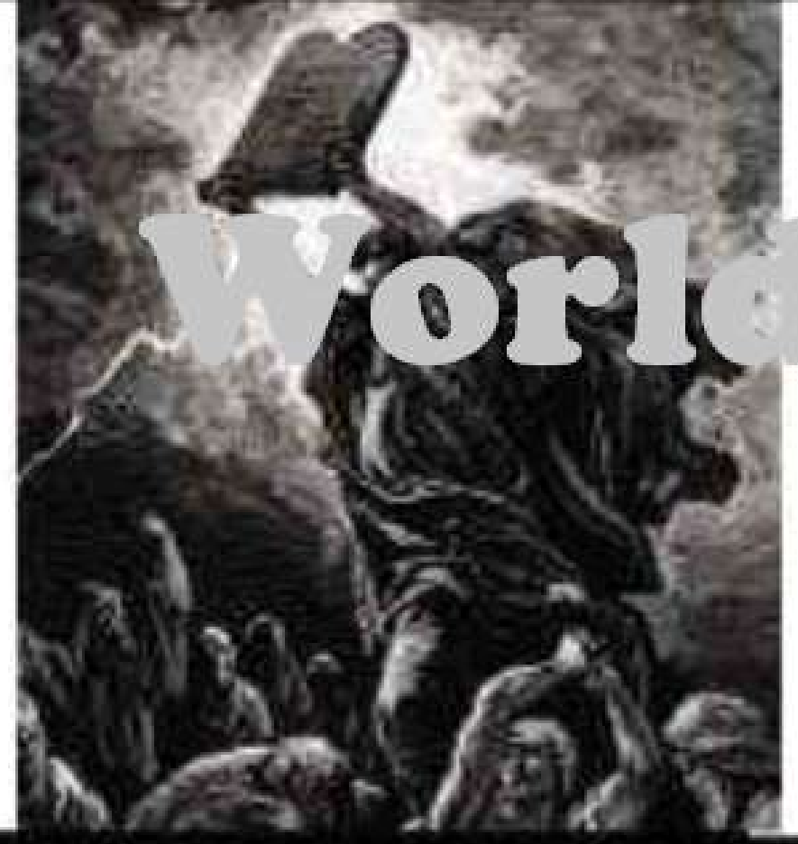

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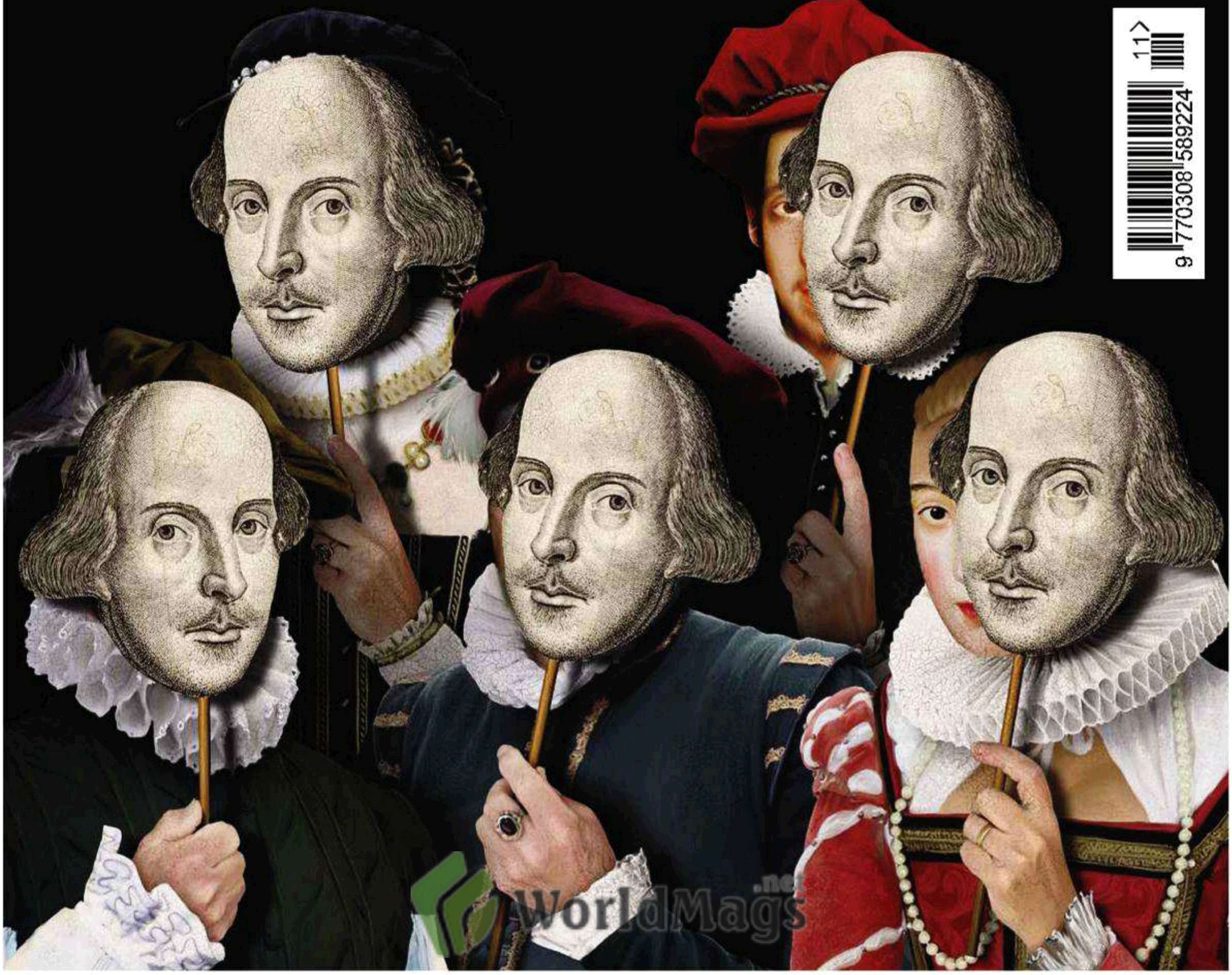

How to Become a Successful Writer!

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Published

By Marian Ashcroft

If you've ever fancied being a writer but don't know where to start – here's the answer. For the past twenty-two years The Writers Bureau has been running a home-study Creative Writing course that teaches ordinary people how to write, get published and earn an extra income.

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The Creative Writing course offered by The Writers Bureau covers all genres – articles, short stories, novels, books, scripts etc. so students get a chance to explore all types of writing to find where their interests and talents lie.

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To find out more about how The Writers Bureau can help you become a successful, published writer contact them for a free prospectus:

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Published

Anne Perdeaux "This has been my first full year as a writer, and I am thrilled with my earnings at this stage – £1589.80 for 2010 – especially as I'm still only half-way through the course. I love being able to tell people that I'm a 'freelance writer'. After 40 years of working I've finally found a job I love!"

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Chris Green "I've had 30 pieces of work accepted by various publications since I started my Writers Bureau course – a mere 18 months ago. I contemplate that fact and I am amazed to have come so far in such a short time. Thanks to the careful and patient tutoring provided by The Writers Bureau and the boundless confidence this has given me, I can continue to explore my potential and see where it takes me."

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Lucy Costigan "This course has so far been simply amazing and has given me the confidence to send in my work to several leading, glossy magazines. My tutor has given me fantastic support and brilliant feedback on every one of my assignments. I find it hard to believe that I have already had four articles published."

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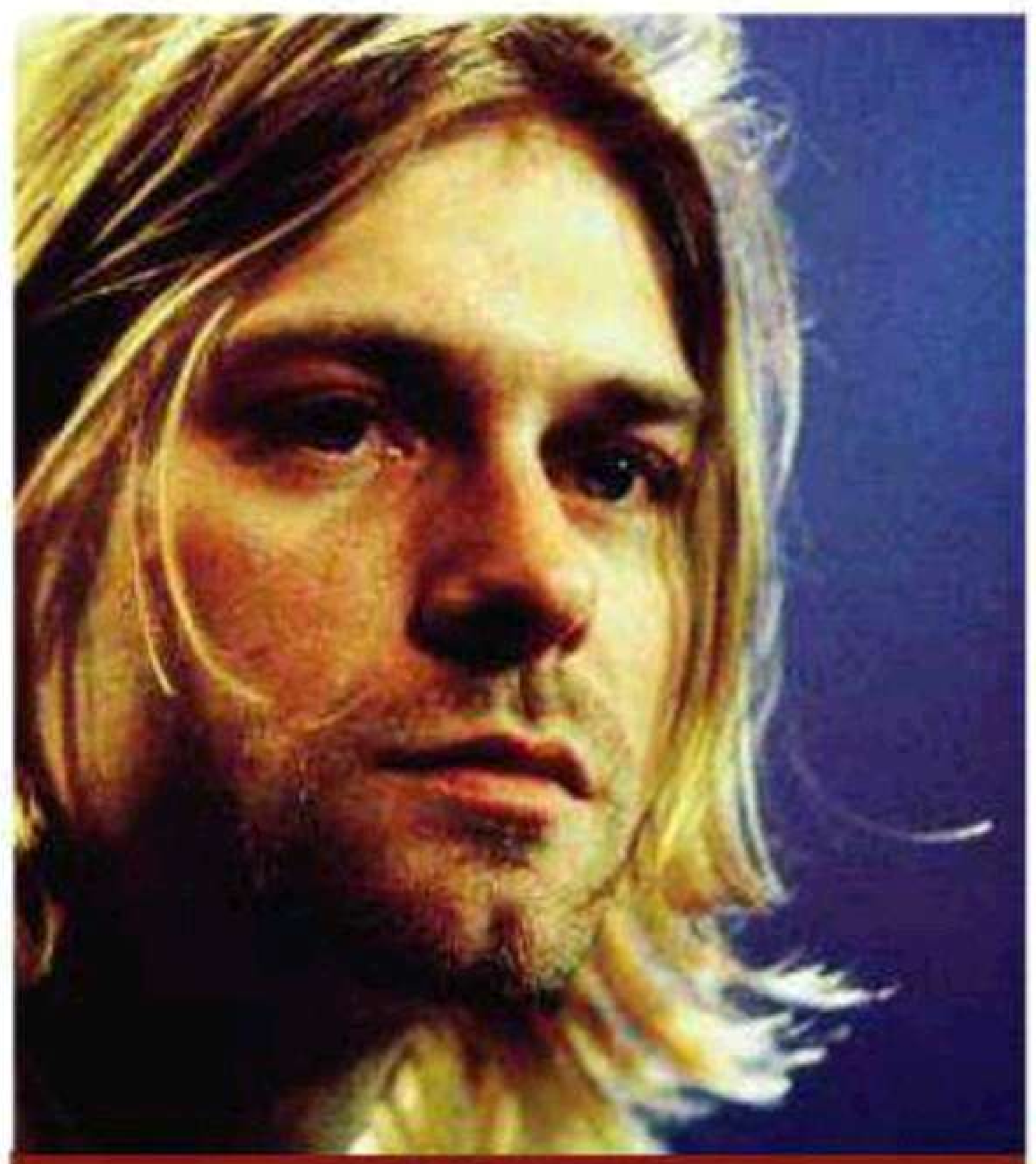

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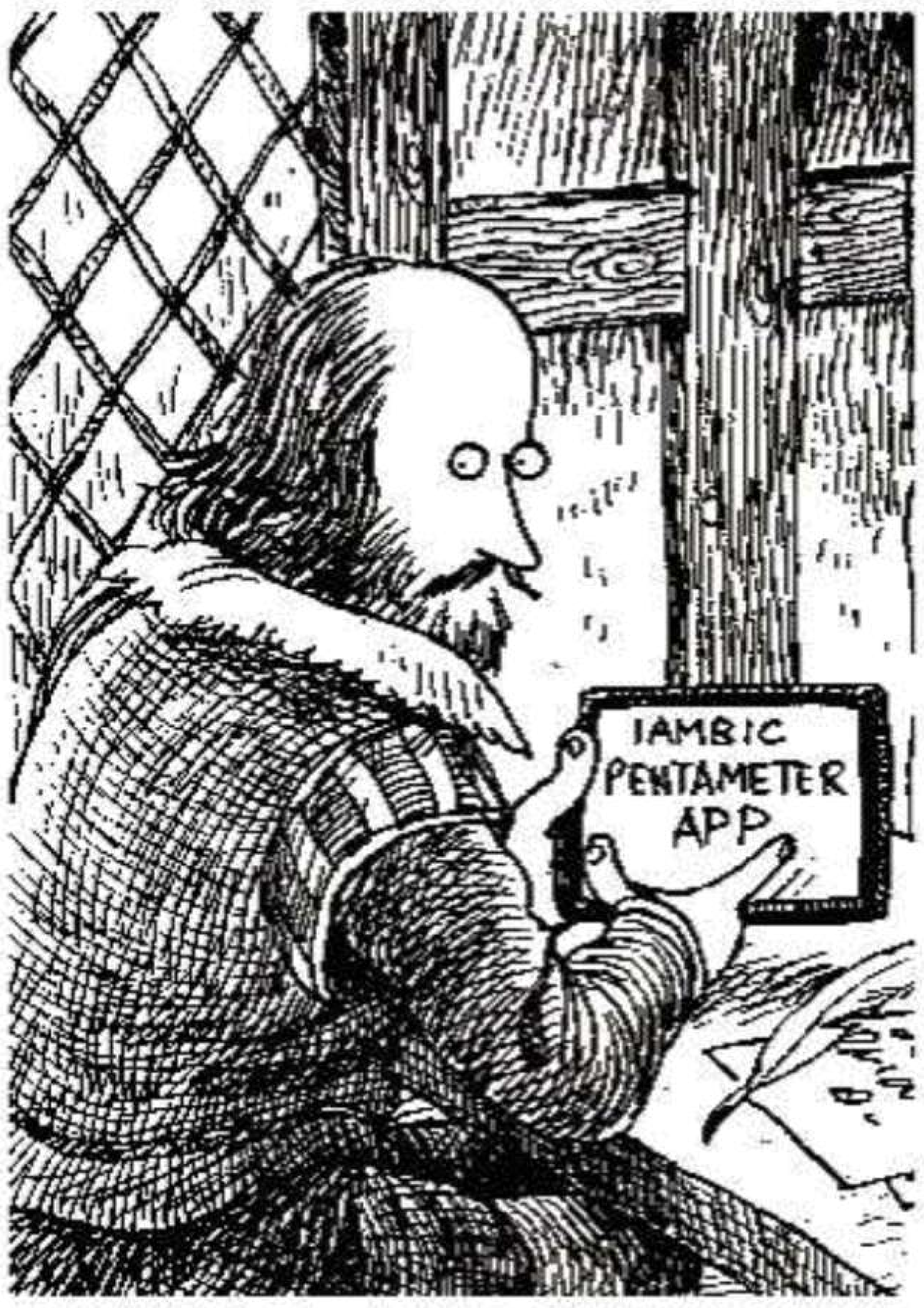
editorial

There's a riot goin' on (or is there?)

One of the more interesting aspects of the recent riots that swept first across London and then other English towns and cities – and one that has drawn a good deal of comment from pundits and politicians – was the use of social media. Blackberry Messenger (a brand having its own Burberry moment) and Twitter, it seemed, had both been used by the rioters to share realtime information about the disturbances, arrange for temporary truces between rival gangs and, in some cases, to plan further unrest in specific locations. Inevitably, a certain degree of moral panic flared around this groundbreaking use of new media; the Home Office wondered whether Twitter should be shut down.



MARTIN ROSS

A counter-argument, perhaps, was provided by the success of Twitter-based clean-up campaigns, which saw broom-wielding do-gooders assembling almost as quickly as had the rioters and restoring some semblance of normality to the debris-littered streets of the capital; a demonstration that a sense of community could be rebuilt, not just destroyed, using social media.

More interesting, from a fortean viewpoint, was the way in which monitoring the unfolding of events in real time via social media allowed one to observe the viral spread of disinformation through the Twittersphere – a rare opportunity to see the virtually instantaneous formation and dissemination of what might be termed urban legends in miniature. Just as the video of one Hackney resident haranguing some young hoodlums was retweeted thousands of times, so were terrifying 140-character warnings of rampaging gangs working their way down specific streets, leaving fire and destruction in their wake. A quick glance out the window was usually enough to reveal such accounts as, at best, fanciful and at worst deliberate lies, spread through a virtual equivalent of Chinese Whispers. Some tweets had a particularly long life, appearing, doing the rounds, and then – presumably, having been found and resuscitated by some latecomer – beginning to circulate all over again. Here's an example: "Avoid London Fields cyclists. Gang of kids mugging people for bikes #hackney please RT". Now, as one local wag pointed out, this sounded par for the course in E8; but the tweet appeared initially the afternoon of Monday 8 August, when things were indeed 'kicking off' in Hackney, and was doubtless given some credence as a result. It's certainly possible that packs of feral youths were relieving cyclists of their steeds, although we've seen no evidence of this. It's also possible that, by a process of lightning-fast ostension, opportunistic local tearaways read this message and headed to London Fields in search of fresh booty as fast as their newly-acquired trainers could carry them. What's undeniable, though, is that this very tweet continued to appear throughout Tuesday, when an influx of Welsh constabulary ensured that very little was happening on the streets of Hackney. Still, the town hall was evacuated, shops boarded up, workers sent home early. Hackney, in reality, was something of a ghost town; meanwhile, in Twitterland, gangs of bike-pinching youths endlessly mugged hapless cyclists in London Fields for the rest of the day and long into the night…

PLANET BLING

Scientists from the University of Manchester have discovered what appears to be a planet made of carbon, orbiting a neutron star (*Reuters*, *25 Aug*). Due to its super-density, it is thought that the planet is largely crystalline – essentially, a whacking great diamond! It sounded like something out of *The Clangers*, but it got us thinking: with all this daft talk about reintroducing national service for disengaged youths, what about a new British space programme to travel to the diamond planet instead? The youngsters' love of shiny bling could be harnessed to an exciting and educational venture that would provide them with the skills to find useful long-term employment, as well as simultaneously solving the country's social problems and reversing its scientific decline. And given that the diamond planet is some 4,000 light years away, it would keep them busy for some time…

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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TO CONQUER EVIL, DARKNESS MUST PREVAIL
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TO CONQUER EVIL,
DARKNESS MUST PREVAIL

STARRING

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(The Reader, War Horse)

CHRISTIAN REDL
(Downfall)

DANIEL BRÜHL
(Inglorious Basterds)

KRABAT
AND THE
LEGEND OF THE SATANIC MILL

“A riveting Faustian tale of teenage boys seduced by the lure of black magic that goes darker than even Harry Potter dares”

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"Boasting darn fine FX, a charismatic Heath Ledger-lookalike as its young lead and a feel that’s half Lord Of The Rings, half Gilliam-esque fairytale, this German fantasy is well worth a look"

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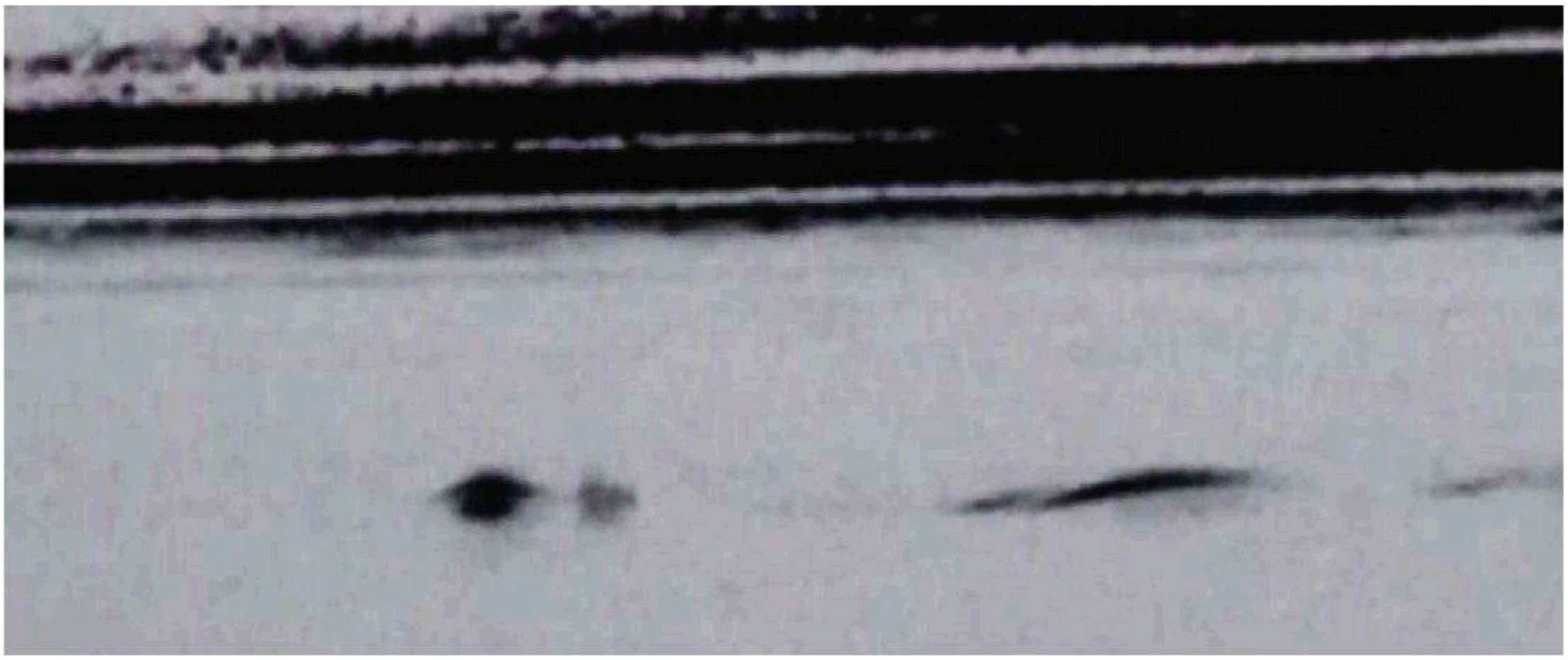
Sea serpents on screen

Fisherman's footage of what seems to be a group of creatures likened to famous monster Caddy



DISCOVERY CHANNEL

ABOVE LEFT: Video still appears to show something swimming the water of Nushagak Bay, Alaska.
FACING PAGE: William Jobes's photo showing something in the waters of Loch Ness.

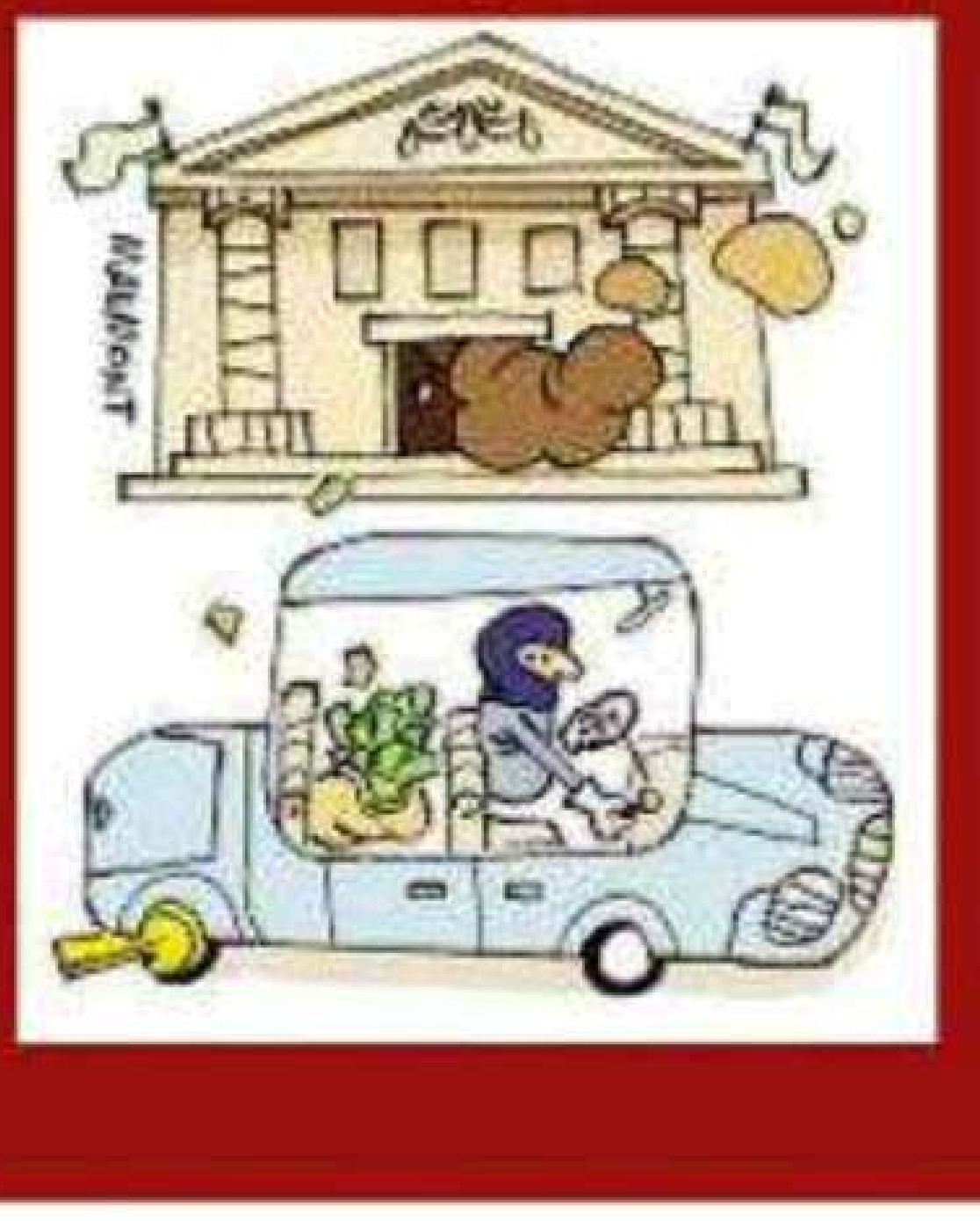
Video footage appearing to show a group of sea serpents, shot in 2009 by fisherman Kelly Nash in Nushagak Bay, Alaska, was broadcast by the Discovery Channel on 18 July 2011. (Nushagak Bay is a large estuary covering over 100 sq km (40 sq miles) in southwest Alaska. It opens to Bristol Bay, a large body of water in the eastern Bering Sea north of the Alaska Peninsula.) One creature appears to be about 10m (33ft) long, with humps on its back. When the head surfaced, a spray came out behind the neck. Marine biologist Paul LeBlond, former head of the department of Earth and Ocean Sciences at the University of British Columbia, believes the footage has captured the marine monster known as 'Caddy' (*Cadborosaurus*), named after Cadboro Bay in British Columbia. Prof. LeBlond is co-author (with zoologist Ed Bousfield) of *Cadborosaurus: Survivor From The Deep* (1995).

There have been more than 300 Caddy sightings in the waters off Vancouver Island, the first back in the 1880s. Typical reports describe the creature as serpentine, with a horse-like head, large eyes, and surprising turn of speed, up to 25mph (40km/h). As it swims, it shows coils or humps, and sometimes front and rear flippers. There have also been at least seven reports of alleged carcases – the most convincing found in a sperm whale's stomach and photographed at Naden Harbour, Queen Charlotte Islands, in 1937 (see "The Dragons of Vancouver" by Mike Dash, FT70:46–48.)

Caddy first made big news in the autumn of 1933, when a Major Langley and his wife allegedly spotted a huge olive green hump while sailing off Discovery Island and the Chatham Islands. Sceptics point out that this was about the time Nessie was making her first headlines round the world. The cryptid was named by Archie Wills, the news director of the Victoria (BC) *Daily Times* in the 1930s; LeBlond and Bousfield gave it the Linnæan designation *Cadborosaurus willsi* in his honour.

> **"The clearest video we have of Caddy by a long shot"**

"This is an amateur video shot under rainy circumstances in a bouncy ship and it's not absolutely conclusive, but it's the clearest video we have of Caddy by a long shot," said Prof. LeBlond. "My first thought was it doesn't look like anything we have in the book. It doesn't look like a whale or a seal or a fish. It must be a mammal or a reptile, since it oscillates up and down in a vertical plane, which eliminates sideways-oscillating fish… It looked as if one was blowing through a hole in the back of the head [suggesting some type of whale]. There was a very visible eye when one of them turned and looked at the boat. In that particular video there seemed to be anything between five and 10 of [the creatures]." He added that sightings of similar



LEGAL LIABILITIES

Some people don't have what it takes for a life of crime

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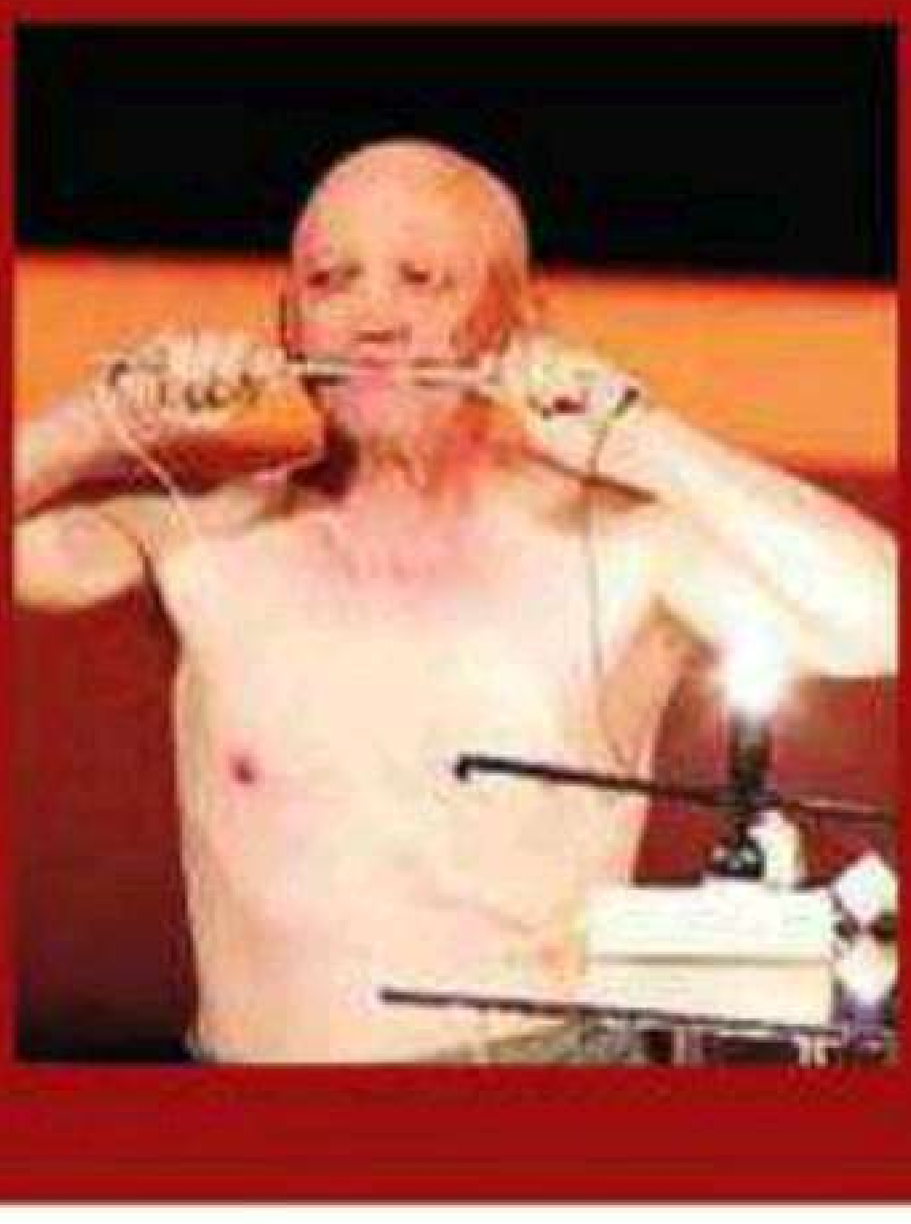

HUMAN CONDUCTOR

An electric man, plus other oddities from the medical world

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UNDERSEA INVADER

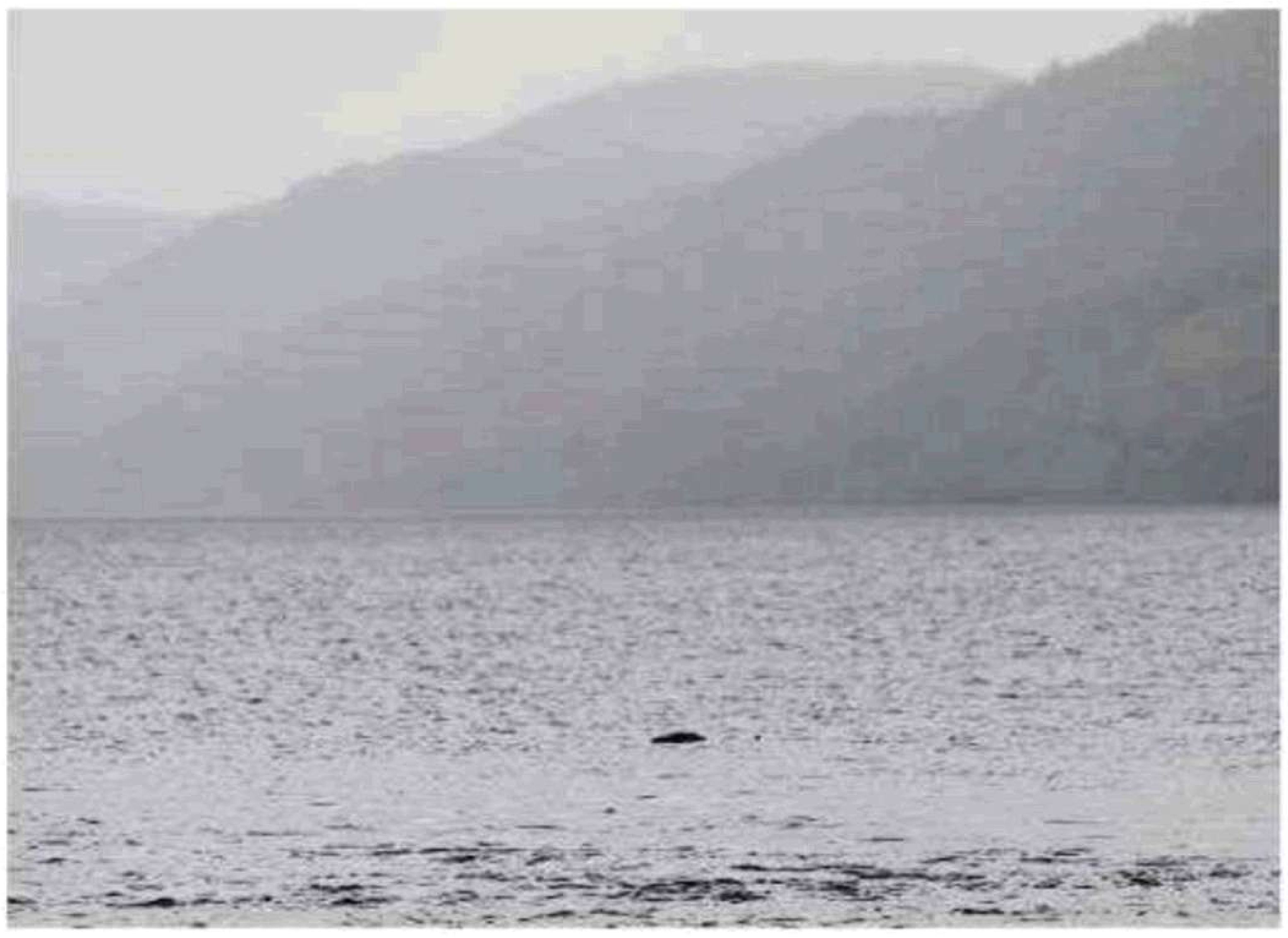
Unidentified Submarine Object on floor of Baltic Sea

PAGE 18–19

animals had been reported along the Pacific coast from southern California to Alaska.

Andy Hillstrand of *Deadliest Catch* television show fame believes he might have seen Caddy while filming the Discovery Channel documentary broadcast this July, which featured the 2009 footage. He and his brother Johnathan travelled to sites in Alaska where the cryptid had been spotted. Referring to one location, he said, "We saw a big, long white thing moving in the water. We chased it for about 20 minutes. Spray came out of its head. It was definitely not a shark. A giant eel may be possible, but eels don't have humps that all move in unison." He added that the many fishermen who have reported seeing the animal "are not a bunch of fruitcakes. These are people who are familiar with the local marine life." He speculated that whales, following salmon, might be pushing the animals closer to shore and into the view of humans. *Discovery News, 18 July; Victoria (BC) Times Colonist, 20 July; dailymail.co.uk, 19 July 2011.*

To see the footage go to: http://dsc.discovery.com/videos/alaskan-monster-hunt-sea-monster-witness.html#mkcpgn=snag1



WILLIAM JOBES / CASCADE NEWS

- Meanwhile in Scotland, William Jobes, 62, from Irvine in Ayrshire, was walking along the Abbey footpath in Fort Augustus, Highland Region, with his wife Joan on 24 May 2011 when he spotted what appeared to be a head bobbing above the surface of Loch Ness, 200–300 yards (180–270m) from shore. It was just after 11.10am. "I got a wonderful shock," he said. "I have actually been coming up to Inverness for the past 45 years and I have never seen anything like this before." He managed to take a single picture before the "head" disappeared under the surface; but then a dark, hump-like shape appeared and he was able to take more photographs. He was convinced it wasn't a seal or a piece of wood. "I immediately did think it was a seal," he said, "but its head was like a sheep." Foyers shop and café owners Jan and Simon Hargreaves believe they caught a glimpse of the creature in June [**FT279:10**]. *Inverness Courier, dailymail.co.uk, 22 July 2011.*

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

'Invisible women' in the workplace

Nottingham & Long Sutton Topper, 23 Mar 2011.

Woman vanishes in bush

(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 24 Mar 2011.

Real life Dragon to address group!

Nottingham & Long Sutton Topper, 23 Mar 2011.

Toenails give fish all-clear

(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 26–27 Mar 2011.

Martians sink Yellow Submarine

Guardian, 16 Mar 2011.

7/7 bomber turned me into a lesbian

(London) Evening Standard, 15 Mar 2011.

Mystery for landlord as rented house vanishes

Irish Independent, 14 Mar 2011.

Fire started by rat smoking in his bed

Metro, 10 Dec 2010.

Backlash as God forced into schools

Sunday Age (Melbourne), 27 Mar 2011.

Shark bites Cancun tourist in surf despite warning

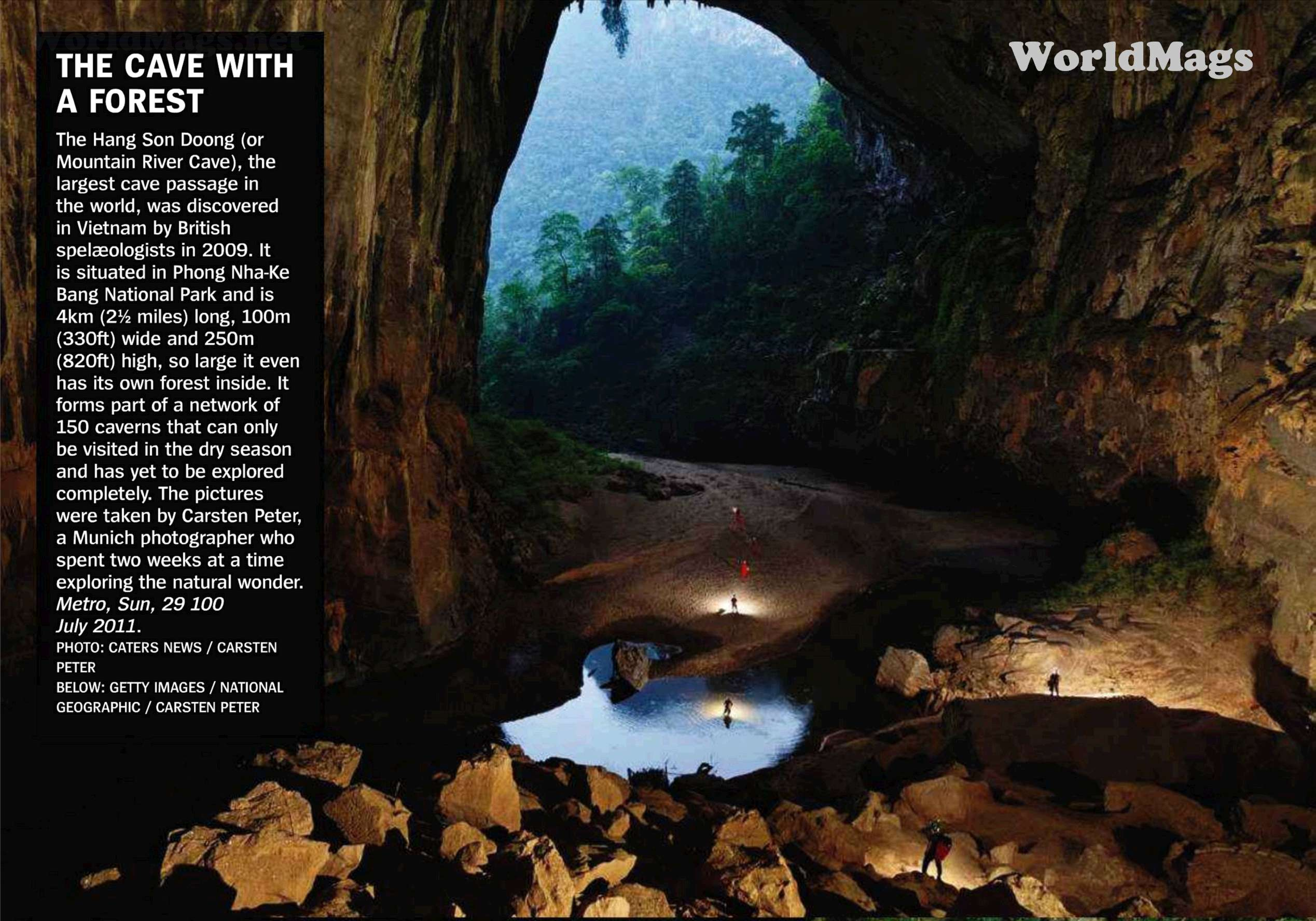
Associated Press, 25 Mar 2011.

Procrastination day deferred

(Melbourne) Sunday Age, 27 Mar 2011.

Centre moves a step closer

Halifax Eve. Courier, 29 Sept 2010.

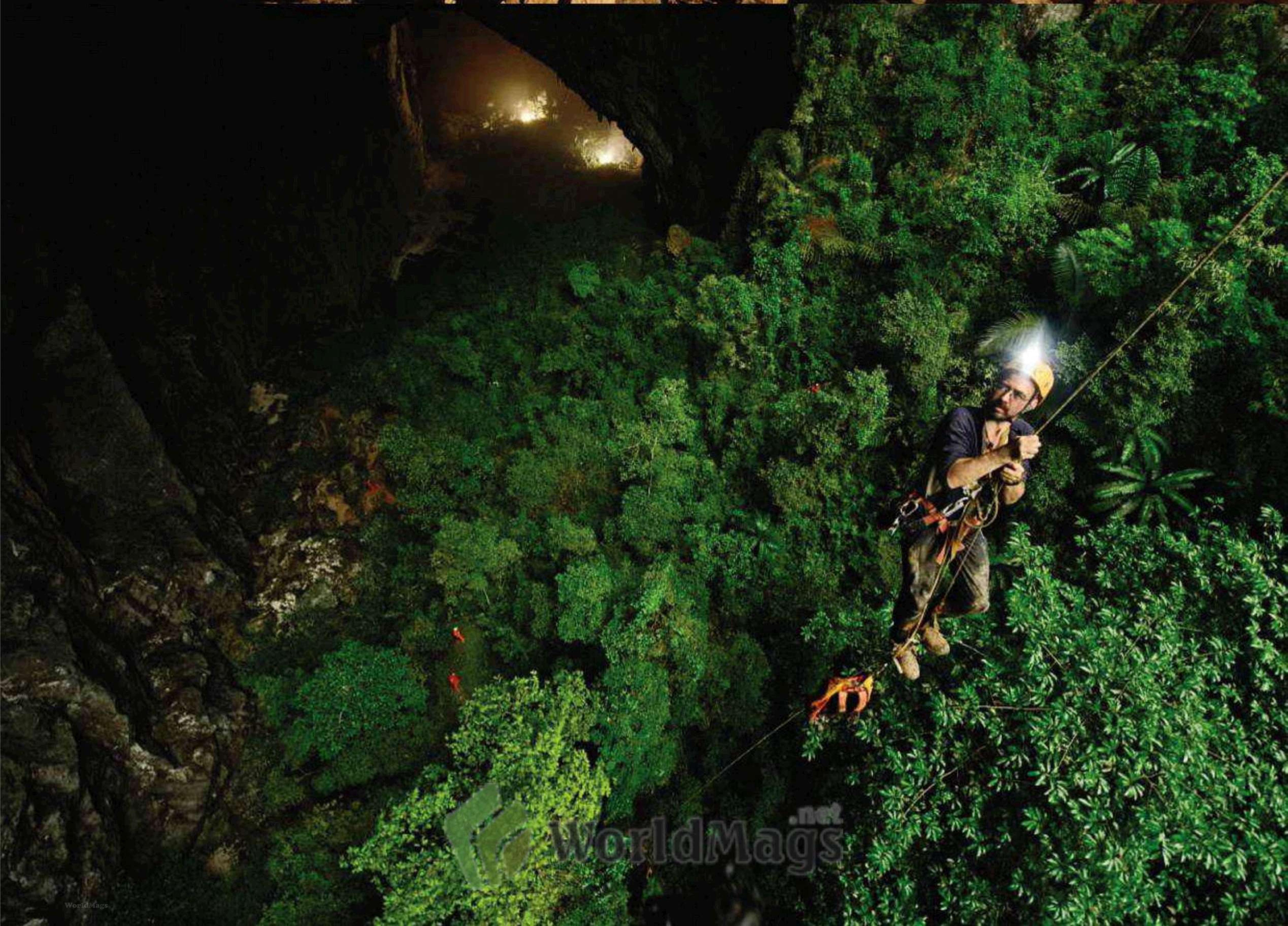


THE CAVE WITH A FOREST

The Hang Son Doong (or Mountain River Cave), the largest cave passage in the world, was discovered in Vietnam by British spelæologists in 2009. It is situated in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park and is 4km (2½ miles) long, 100m (330ft) wide and 250m (820ft) high, so large it even has its own forest inside. It forms part of a network of 150 caverns that can only be visited in the dry season and has yet to be explored completely. The pictures were taken by Carsten Peter, a Munich photographer who spent two weeks at a time exploring the natural wonder. *Metro, Sun, 29 100 July 2011*.

PHOTO: CATERS NEWS / CARSTEN PETER

BELOW: GETTY IMAGES / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC / CARSTEN PETER



ICE DISCS IN CHINESE BAY

Ice discs formed in Liaodong Bay, northeast China, last February, the first time the unusual phenomenon had been seen there. Ice discs, or pans, occur in slow-moving water in cold climates. They are thin slabs of ice that rotate slowly in the water, and occur most frequently in Scandinavia and North America, and occasionally in Britain. Some of the Chinese discs were as large as 10m (33ft) across, while even the smallest was 2m (7ft) in diameter. *<i>, 22 Feb 2011; see also FT74:23–27, 248:22–23, 254:8*.

PHOTO: REX FEATURES / QUIRKY CHINA NEWS

SIDELINES...

GOLF BALL RAIN

Residents and police were baffled after dozens of golf balls began dropping at speed into their gardens despite being nowhere near a golf course. The balls were hurtling into the gardens at (appropriately) The Drive in Oakley, Hampshire, where properties are worth up to £400,000. *D.Telegraph, 1 July 2011.*

FORK-BENDER BANNED

A magician was ejected from a bar and quizzed by police after he bent one of his own forks during a trick for friends. Paul Fisher, 35, (stage name: Paul Saint) was told to leave the Après Bar in Lichfield, Staffordshire. Proprietor Fiona Williams claimed the fork was "a security issue". A police spokesman said no record of the incident had been logged. *Sunday Mercury, 19 June 2011.*

MYSTERY SICK

A 35lb (16kg) bag of human vomit was found in the parking lot of a Bed Bath and Beyond store in Radnor, Pennsylvania, on Sunday, 5 June, just like the one found there the previous Sunday – 29 May. Both were found in the same spot: under a tree, 10 parking rows from the store entrance. Police suggested it was hospital waste, but a hospital worker disagreed. "Hospitals don't segregate vomit," said Steve Pendergast. "I think something is amiss." *NBC Philadelphia, 22 June 2011.*

MARTIN ROSS

Easy work for the cops

Latest round-up of lawbreakers going straight – to court

Sariyah Malik, 21, tried to steal the wheels from an unmarked police vehicle in Spreitenback, Switzerland – but the officers were still inside. The Tunisian was caught by a team that was stationed in the area to catch car crooks. *Metro, 11 July 2011.*

A man who hijacked a car when he took it for a test drive in Sydney on 5 July was caught after leaving his driver's licence details with the dealer. The customer left the Warwick Farm yard with a salesman in a 2007 Mitsubishi Lancer. Later, the salesman stopped to swap drivers, but the man locked the doors and drove off. Police went to the address on the licence, found the car and arrested a 26-year-old man. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 7 July 2011.*

Shoplifter Bernd Wirtz, 19, made a clean getaway from store detectives in Cologne, Germany – until he turned round to see if he was clear, ran into a concrete pillar, and knocked himself out. He woke up in hospital to find police waiting to interview him. *Metro, 14 July 2011.*

Two young men before Toowomba District Court in Queensland robbed a service station and, as they fled, ditched their hooded jackets. It wasn't until they got home that they realised their loot – cash and cigarettes – was still in the pockets of the jackets. *(Brisbane) Courier-Mail, 14 May 2010.*

Dustin Matthew Marshall, 20, walked out of a Walmart in Gallatin, Tennessee, wearing stolen jeans. He wasn't too difficult to track down, as he had left his old denims behind, with his wallet and ID in a pocket. *Canberra Times, 21 Oct 2010.*

A 24-year-old woman in a bikini stole a car in Southaven, Mississippi, drove to an RV dealership, strode inside and demanded money. She said she had a gun. However, since she clearly had no place to conceal a weapon, bemused workers held her until the police arrived. She was charged with carjacking and assault. *NY Post, 28 July 2009.*

FRANÇOIS MAUMONT

He stole jeans but left his ID card behind in his old pair

Layton Spinks, 27, from Llanrumney, Cardiff, rang the police to report the theft of a crowbar along with his car, but was arrested when it was found at the scene of a crime. He had used it to break into a series of warehouses. A police spokesman said: "A Homebase crowbar had been recovered from the scene of a burglary and enquiries revealed that only one had been purchased recently – the day before the burglaries took place. His fingerprints were found on it and also on items left at the scene." Spinks was jailed for eight months. He had a previous conviction for theft in 2003. Police caught him with business cards that read: "Robbers Are Us – nationwide theft, strictly bikes and cars." *D.Mail, 28 May; Sun, 29 May 2011.*

Max Fleck, 20, called Chicago police on 14 July to say that three men had just robbed him of two pounds of marijuana. As officers spoke to him about the robbery, they saw various other drugs "in plain view", and charged him with felony possession of controlled substances. *Chicago Tribune, 15 July 2011.*

A couple from San Marcos, southern California, who boasted on a television show that they made as much as $3,500 (£2,176) a week by selling shoplifted Lego toy kits on eBay, were arrested in September 2009. Matthew Eaton, 34, got 27 months and his wife Laura, 27, 12 months. The scam had made them at least $100,000 between June 2007 and March 2009. *BBC News, 22 Mar 2010.*

A 30-year-old woman walked into a Wells Fargo bank branch in Hillsboro, Oregon, and handed a teller a note that said: "Need $300 or I'll kill you. I'm serious." The teller told the woman she couldn't read her writing. While the woman stepped away to rewrite the note on a bank slip, the teller hit a silent alarm and the bank manager intervened, asking the woman how he could help her. Police and FBI agents soon arrived and arrested the woman. She was said to be under the influence of drugs. *[AP] 30 Sept 2009.*

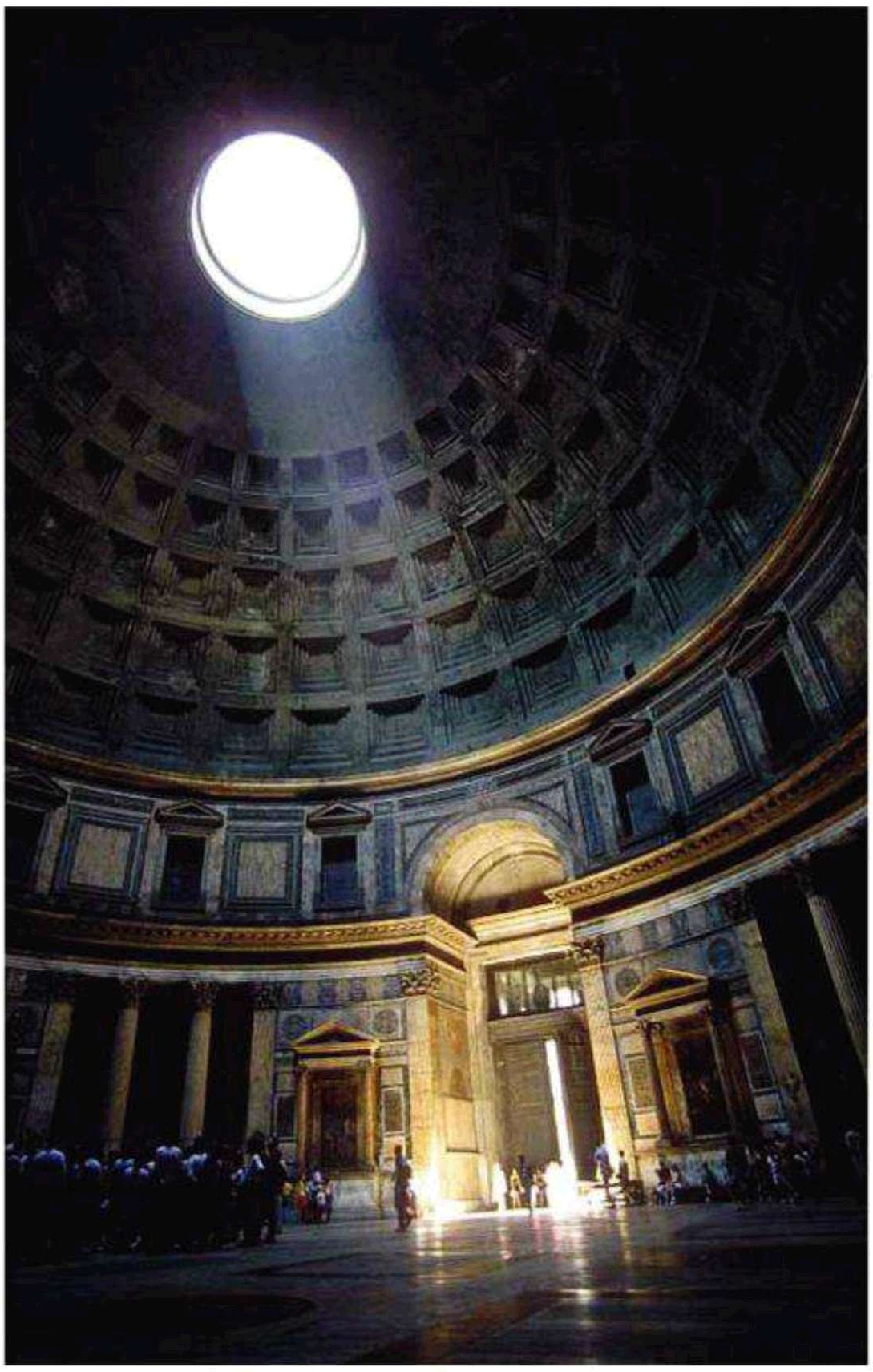
Wearing a black ski mask, Feliks Goldshtein, 24, stood in line behind other customers in a bank in Stow, Ohio. When he reached the counter, he displayed a toy gun, demanded money and made off with an undisclosed amount. He was arrested soon after. *MX News (Brisbane), 14 Jan 2009.*

Pantheon light show

This ancient Roman edifice is still revealing its tricks

The Pantheon in Rome (right) was commissioned by Marcus Agrippa in 27 BC and rebuilt under the Emperor Augustus. It was destroyed by fire in AD 80, rebuilt under the Emperor Domitian, and burned down again in 110 after being struck by lightning. The building we see today was completed in about AD 126 under the Emperor Hadrian. The historian Cassius Dio speculated in about 200 that the name (meaning "to every god") comes either from the statues of so many gods placed around the building, or from the resemblance of the dome to the heavens. In 609, the Pantheon became a Christian church dedicated to St Mary and the Martyrs, and is now known informally as Santa Maria Rotonda.

The hemispherical dome – still the world's largest unreinforced concrete dome – has a 30ft (9m) wide circular hole known as the *oculus*, which gives the interior its only source of light. (It also lets in the rain, and there are tiny holes in the floor that act as a drain.) The height to the oculus and the diameter of the interior circle are both 142ft (43.3m). Giulio Magli, a historian of ancient architecture from Milan Polytechnic, and Robert Hannah, a classics scholar from the University of Otago in New Zealand, have discovered that at precisely midday during the March equinox, a circular shaft of light shines through the oculus and illuminates the Pantheon's entrance. The size and shape of the beam matches, down to the last inch, a semicircular stone arch above the doorway. A similar effect is seen on 21 April, which the Romans celebrated as the founding date of their city (in 753 BC), when at midday the Sun strikes a metal grille above the doorway, flooding the colonnaded courtyard outside with light. Magli and Hannah published their research in the journal *Numen* in July this year. It seems astonishing that the solar effects had gone unnoticed until now.



REX FEATURES / STEVE WILLIAMS

The dramatic solar displays would have been seen by the Romans as elevating an emperor to the realm of the gods – a cosmological affirmation of his divine power as he entered the building, which was used as an audience hall as well as a place of worship. He was in effect being "invited" by the Sun to enter the Pantheon, which as its name suggests was dedicated to the most important deities in the Roman world. "The emperor would have been illuminated as if by film studio lights," said Prof. Magli. "The Romans believed the relationship between the emperor and the heavens was at its closest during the equinoxes. It would have been a glorification of the power of the emperor and of Rome itself."

The Sun had a special significance for the Romans. The god Apollo was associated with the Sun, and a giant statue of Emperor Nero on the site (formerly his Golden Palace) was remodelled by his successors as the Greek Sun god Helios – the Colossus which gave its name to the Colosseum. *D.Telegraph, 1 Aug; D.Mail, 2 Aug 2011.*

SIDELINES...

REALITY CHECK

A Polish artist risked jail by painting a supermarket shelf full of beer cans. Police in Cieszyn seized Michal Oginski's canvas, saying it breached alcohol advertising laws. "I was told my work corrupts youth and promotes alcoholism," said the 25-year-old, "but it's just a painting of beer cans." *Sunday Mail, 5 June 2011.*

TITANIC II

Mark Wilkinson, 44, bought a second-hand cabin cruiser, named it *Titanic II* and towed it from his home in Birmingham to Dorset, where he enjoyed a spot of fishing in Lyme Bay. Afterwards, as he entered West Bay harbour, a hole about 6in (15cm) square opened up in the 16ft (4.9m) fibreglass hull and Mr Wilkinson was rescued by the harbour master as the boat sank. "I got pretty fed up with people asking me if I had hit an iceberg," he said. *Sun, 7 June; Metro, 8 June 2011.*

HEAD SKINNED

A horse had its head skinned after being shot through the heart in its paddock near Esk, Queensland, sometime between 8 and 12 May. The skin was missing from the scene. "It was someone who was quite skilled, who knew what they were doing," said a police spokesman. The horse was a thoroughbred with a white star on its forehead. *Queensland Times, 21 May 2011.*

BIG CAT FLAP

On 21 May, Hampshire police were alerted to a white tiger in a field in Hedge End, near Southampton. They liaised with Marwell Zoo to arrange a tranquilliser dart before scrambling a helicopter. A golf course was cleared, a cricket match suspended, and plans made to close the M27 motorway. When thermal-imaging gear detected no heat and the tiger rolled over in the chopper's downdraft, they realised it was a stuffed, life-sized toy. *Guardian, 23 May 2011.*

SIDELINES...

DOG EATS TOES

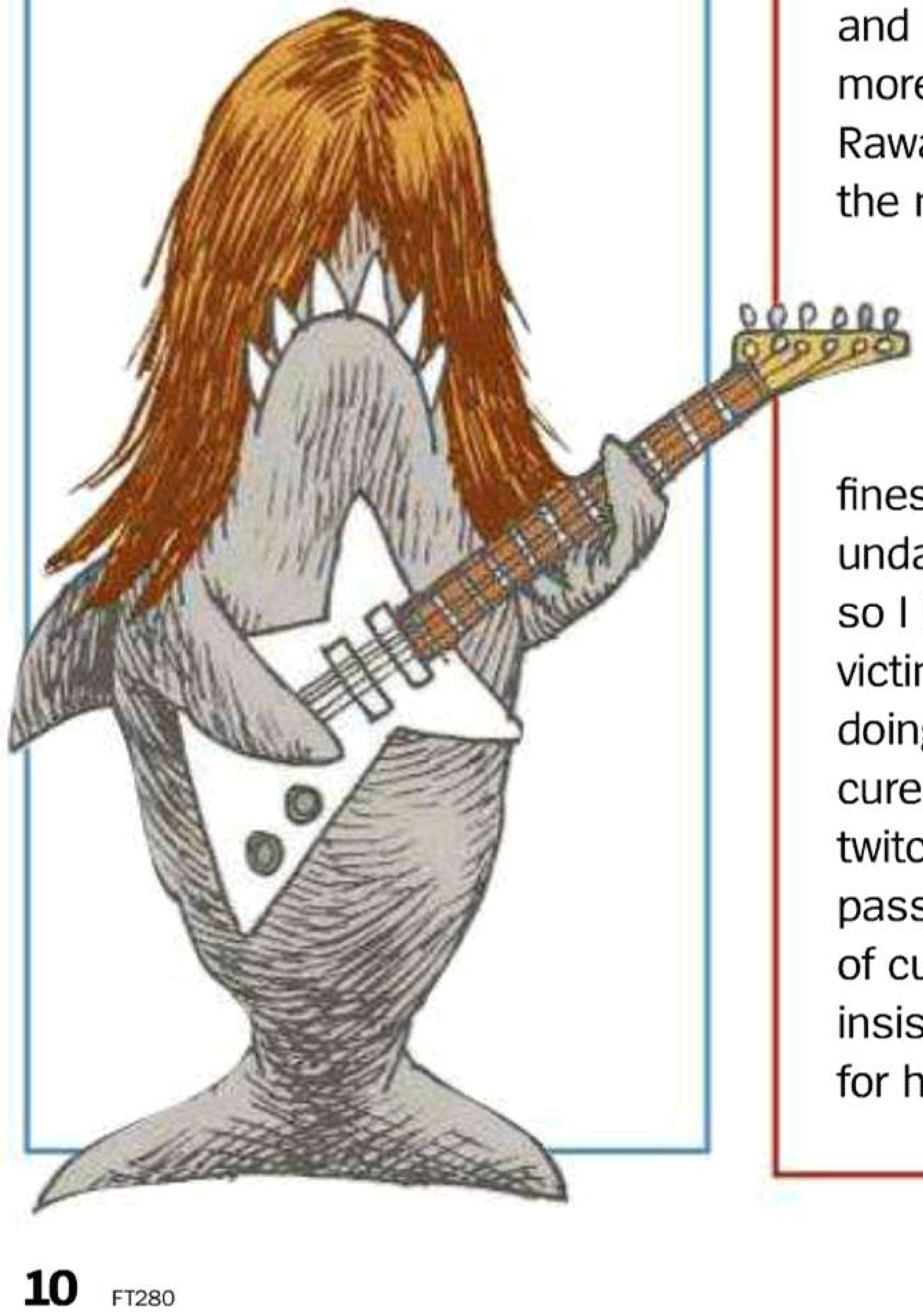
A dog ate his diabetic owner's toes as he slept on a couch. James Little, 61, of Roseburg, Oregon, awoke on 1 March to find part of his right foot missing, including three toes, and called emergency services. An animal expert said the dog, a Shiba Inu, probably acted instinctively to remove diseased tissue after being attracted to a festering wound. *[AP] 4 Mar 2011*.

1066 AND ALL THAT

Economic research has shown that Britons with "Norman" surnames – such as Darcy, Percy, Glanville and Mandeville – are substantially wealthier than those with traditionally "poor" or artisan surnames, such as Smith and Shepherd, almost 1,000 years after the Norman Conquest. *D.Telegraph, 4 April 2011*.

SHARK ROCK

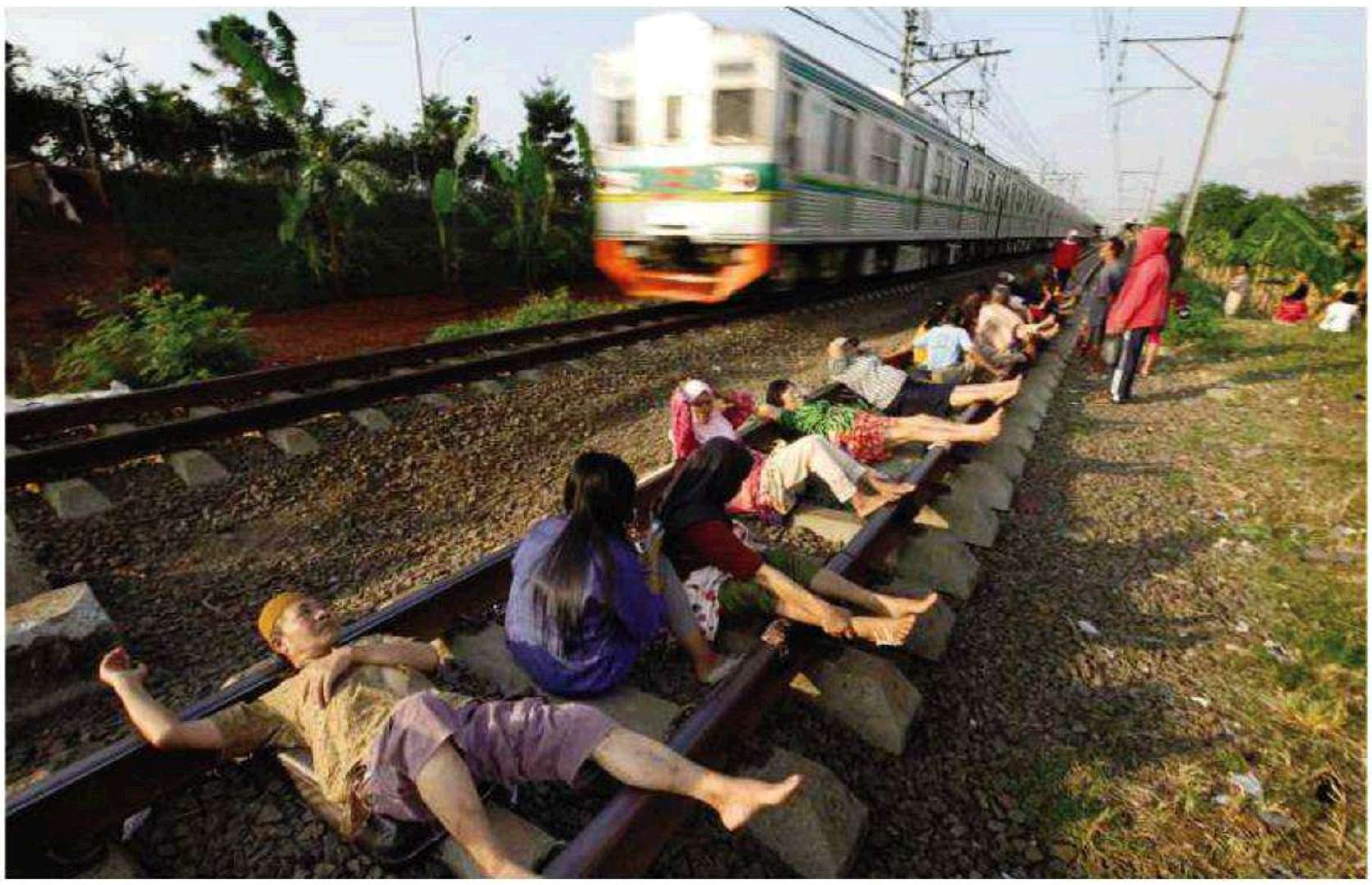
Australian shark tour operator Matt Waller, playing music underwater, found that when he played tracks by AC/DC, in particular "You Shook Me All Night Long", great white sharks became more investigative and inquisitive, and a lot less aggressive. They even rubbed their faces along the speaker. They don't have external ears, so are simply responding to the frequencies and vibrations. *New Musical Express, Metro, 2 June 2011*.



MARTIN ROSS

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

THE SEARCH FOR A CURE CAN LEAD DOWN SOME STRANGE PATHWAYS...



REUTERS / ENNY NURAHENI

Authorities in Indonesia are struggling to crack down on a dangerous trend among people too poor to afford medical treatment: lying on electrified railway tracks in the belief that the current cures illness (above). Dozens turn up in Rawa Buaya outside Jakarta in western Java every day, enticed by a rumour about an ethnic Chinese man paralysed by a stroke who went to the tracks to kill himself, but found he was cured. Among other benefits, railway 'therapy' is thought to alleviate hypertension, diabetes and rheumatism, and boost vitality. Until recently, more than 50 people came to the Rawa Buaya tracks every day, but the numbers dropped since the state-run railway company erected a warning sign and threatened penalties of up to three months in prison or fines of £1,000. Some people are undaunted. "I want to be cured, so I have come back," said stroke victim Hadi Winoto, 50. "I'll keep doing this until I'm completely cured," said Sri Mulyati, 50, twitching visibly as an oncoming passenger train sent an extra rush of current through her body. She insisted that it provided more relief for her symptoms – high blood pressure, sleeplessness and high cholesterol – than any doctor had since she was first diagnosed with diabetes 13 years ago. *Sun, 20 July; [AP] 2 Aug 2011*.

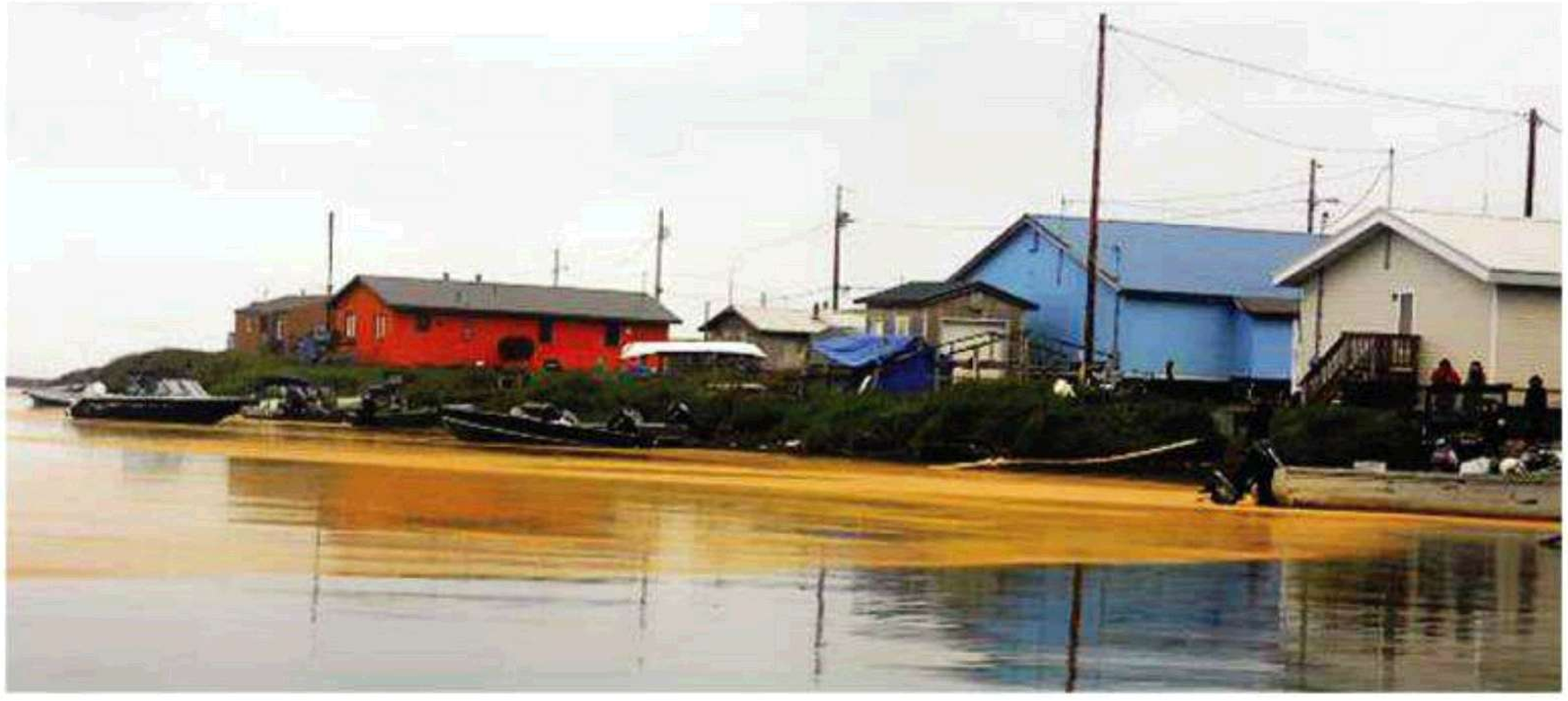
Thousands of asthma sufferers converged on Hyderabad in southern India on 8 June to eat a masala spice mix stuffed inside live sardines (known locally as murrel) as a cure for their condition. The fish is said to help clear the gullet as it descends to the stomach, where it releases the medicine. It survives for about 15 minutes, supposedly clearing accumulated phlegm as it flaps about. After swallowing the fish, patients are told to begin a strict 45-day diet of 25 different foods and abstain from alcohol, caffeine, tobacco and deep-fried foods. They must repeat the treatment for at least two successive years.

The so-called "fish medicine festival" is administered by 200 members of the extended Goud family every June on an auspicious date selected by astrologers at the onset of the monsoon season. The family refuses to disclose the ingredients of the spice mix or to explain how it cures the respiratory illnesses that afflict millions of Indians. According to legend, a Himalayan saint revealed the wonder cure to Bathini Veeranna Goud in 1845, in gratitude for being given dry clothes and food on a rainy day. He warned the family that it wouldn't work if they tried to profit from it. "It has been the practice of the Goud family for the past 166 years to offer this medicine free of cost to those who need it," said Harinath Goud, the current head of the family. Indian railways run special trains to bring patients from all over the subcontinent.

This year, children's rights campaigners have called for the festival to be banned and accused the organisers of putting children at risk with an unproven treatment and unhygienic practices: family members give out fish to hundreds of thousands of people without washing their hands. Harinath Goud countered that complainers were in the pockets of pharmaceutical companies. "These companies are paying money to rake up the issue as they are worried about the fish medicine affecting their business interests, since what we administer is a permanent cure for asthma," he said. *[AP, R] 9 June 1997; D.Telegraph, 8 June; Metro, 10 June 2011*. See also **FT102:15**; **200:22–23**.

Orange lagoon goo

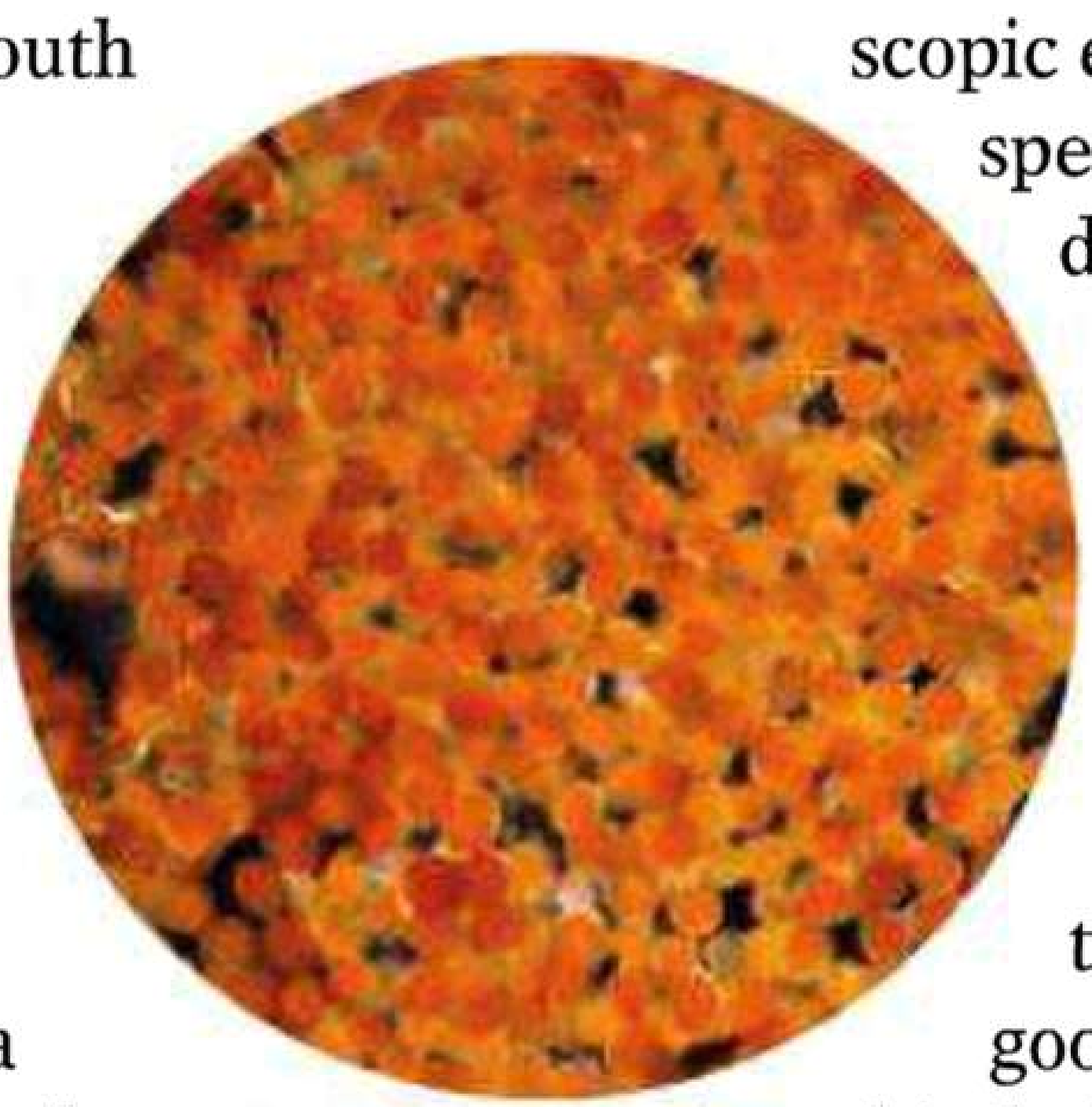
Mysterious coloured matter surprises Inuit village



AP / PA IMAGES / CITY OF KIVALINA

ABOVE: Residents of Kivalina in Alaska worried that the material could be toxic, as dead minnows had been seen in the water.

On Wednesday, 3 August, a strange bright orange substance washed up on the shores of Kivalina on the coast of Alaska, about 620 miles (1,000km) northwest of Anchorage. It covered most of the harbour, attracting crowds of bemused residents. On Thursday, the orange stuff was found floating on top of the rain buckets residents use to collect drinking water, as well as on at least one roof – suggesting it had come from above. By Friday, the substance had dissipated or washed out to sea, and what was left on the ground had dried to a powder. Samples were sent to laboratories in Anchorage and South Carolina.



NOAA

At first it was said to be tiny eggs – species unknown

Kivalina is an Inupiat Inuit community (population 374) located at the tip of an 8-mile (12km) barrier reef between the Chukchi Sea and Kivalina River to the north and the Wulik River to the south. The orange stuff was found widely spread in streaks along the Wulik River and on the lagoon, which is half a mile (800m) wide and six miles (10km) long. City Councilwoman Frances Douglas estimated the volume of material she could see as "in excess of a thousand gallons, easily". Local people had never seen anything like it before and elders had never heard any ancestral stories about it.

A couple of days later, the goo was identified as millions of microscopic eggs of an unknown species, filled with fatty droplets. Officials with the Alaska Fisheries facility of the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) said they believed the goo consisted of some kind of crustacean eggs or embryos. They couldn't say if they were toxic, which worried the inhabitants of Kivalina, as there had been at least one report of dead minnows found in the village lagoon the night the eggs appeared. Julie Speegle of the NOAA dismissed speculation that the phenomenon, which occurred soon after showers, was a result of climate change. It remained a mystery why such a large volume of eggs washed up (or fell?) on Kivalina, and why they had never been seen there before.

Then, a week or so later, the NOAA lab in Charleston, South Carolina, announced the goo wasn't eggs at all, but a mass of fungal spores. "At this point, the best identification we can give… is a rust fungus," said lab spokesman Dr Steve Morton. "The spores are unlike others we and our network of specialists have examined; however, many rust fungi of the Arctic tundra have yet to be identified."

Researchers weren't sure whether this particular type of rust fungus was one of the 7,800 species that had already been identified. For one thing, its spores had unusual spines covering their surface. A NOAA press release stated that rust fungus "infects only plants, causing a rust-like appearance on leaves and stems. Rust fungi reproduce to infect other plants by releasing spores which disperse, often-times great distances, by wind and water." Research on the intriguing goo continues. *telegraph.co.uk, 6 Aug; [AP] 9 Aug; Independent, 10 Aug; npr.org, 18 Aug 2011.*

SIDELINES...

HAIRY DISGUISE

Victor Bernal, 58, and Eduardo Berges, 32, were convicted in Miami, Florida, of trying to smuggle endangered primates. They were attempting to ship a gorilla and an orang-utan to Mexico when the 'gorilla' turned out to be a federal agent in costume. (Old news, admittedly – but classic.) *Western Mail, 19 May 1994*.

TAKEN TO THE CLEANERS

Three women were accused of conning people out of thousands of dollars in Florida by promising to 'cleanse' them of evil spirits. One person was told a Rolex watch was needed to remove demons. Prosecutors say at least £36,717 was taken from victims. *[PA] 12 May 2011*.

SHADOWY SERVICE

Yvonne Schwartz, 36, had her car stolen as she unloaded shopping in Neuruppin, Germany – but it was returned the next day, washed and with a full tank of petrol. *Sun, 23 July 2011*.

STORK-STARING

Troops ordered to scare away storks from an air show in Zeltweg, Austria, were banned from using their guns and told to stare at the birds instead, which worked a treat. (A stork can bring down a plane if sucked into the engine.) *Metro, 27 June 2011*.

MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

SECRET SHARK FOUND

Stunned staff at Blackpool Sea Life Centre discovered a shark had been living in their ocean tank for years, after finding two shark eggs in a tank occupied by sharks that only give birth to live young. It was believed a tropical carpet shark had been introduced but not recorded. *Morning Star, 20 May 2011*.

MOB WEE DEFENCE

Michael Jones, 50, stands accused of peeing on a platform at Waterloo station in London and attacking a policeman. Gwawr Thomas, his defence counsel, told Westminster magistrates on 31 May: "[Mr Jones] urinated in self-defence because the water supply was poisoned by the Mafia". *Sun, 1 June 2011*.

COX AND NOBBERS

After a radio programme called *Infinite Monkey Cage*, during which particle physicist Brian Cox and comedian Robin Ince repeatedly poked fun at people who believe in ghosts and spirits, listeners phoned in to complain the show was "unbalanced". In response, Prof. Cox commented on Twitter: "There are some utter nobbers out there… There are no ghosts, so it would be silly to believe in them." *D.Telegraph, 9 July 2011*.

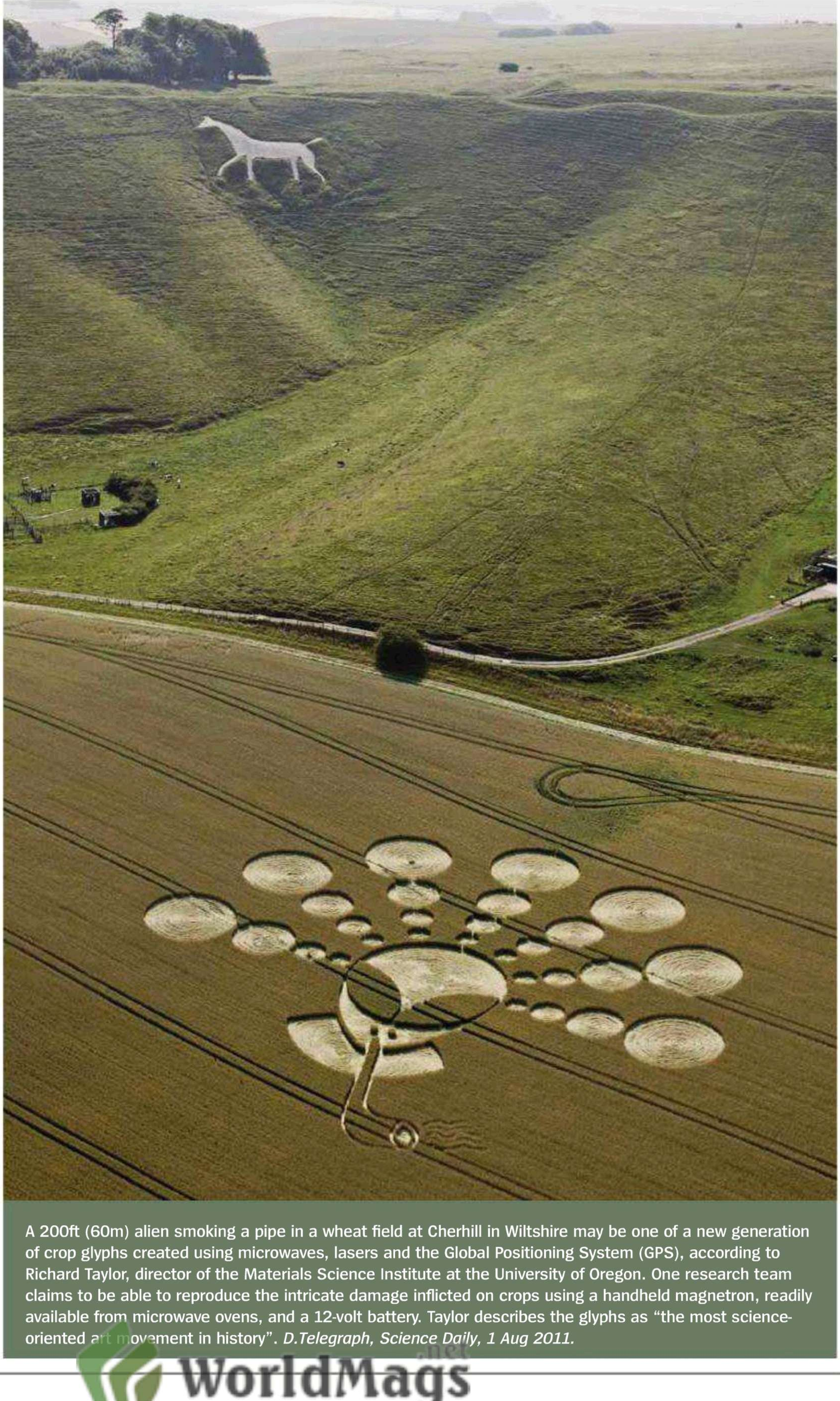
SUICIDAL BITE

Orit Fox's bid to pose seductively with a massive boa constrictor in Tel Aviv ended in chaos when she licked the snake's head and it reacted by biting her left breast. The surgically enhanced Israeli model was rushed to hospital for a tetanus jab, while the unfortunate snake died of silicone poisoning. *dailymail.co.uk, 15 Mar 2011*.

SNEAKY RAT

The outback Queensland town of Stonehenge was offering a reward for a rat that had stolen the false teeth of Margaret Pidgeon from her bedside table. "He didn't waste any time, the bugger," she said. Rat numbers had exploded after an exceptionally wet season. *MX News (Sydney), 25 May 2011*.

ALIEN SMOKER



REX FEATURES / STEVE ALEXANDER

A 200ft (60m) alien smoking a pipe in a wheat field at Cherhill in Wiltshire may be one of a new generation of crop glyphs created using microwaves, lasers and the Global Positioning System (GPS), according to Richard Taylor, director of the Materials Science Institute at the University of Oregon. One research team claims to be able to reproduce the intricate damage inflicted on crops using a handheld magnetron, readily available from microwave ovens, and a 12-volt battery. Taylor describes the glyphs as "the most science-oriented art movement in history". *D.Telegraph, Science Daily, 1 Aug 2011.*

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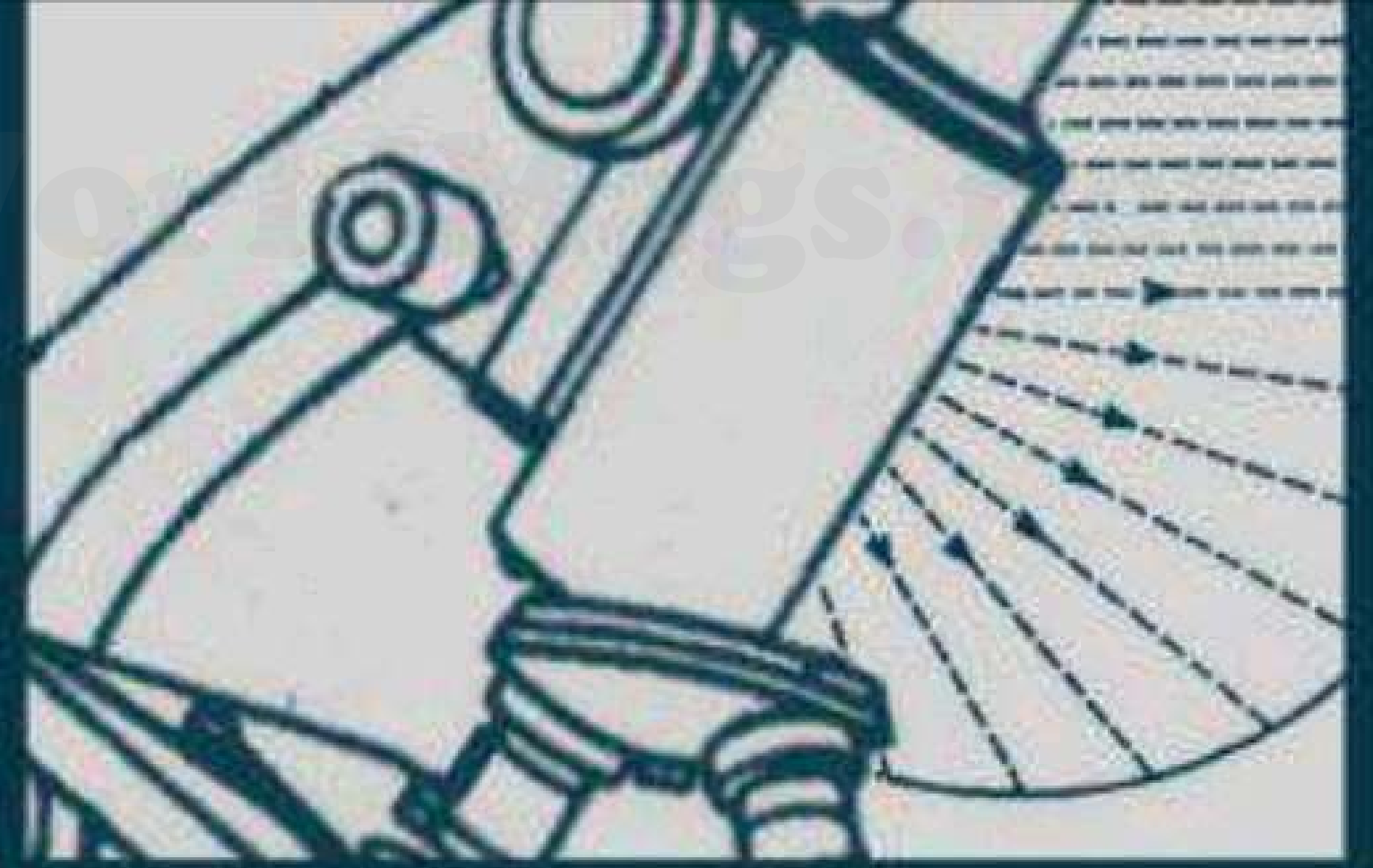

MATT PATTINSON

WE'RE JAMMING...

DAVID HAMBLING asks what happened when a 2007 military exercise went wrong, why are the details still secret, and what are the implications for the rest of us?

US NAVY VIAGETTY IMAGES / US NAVY VIA MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST 2ND CLASS ROLAND A FRANKLIN

San Diego, 22 January 2007. There was nothing unusual in the local news reports during the day. Two police officers were slightly injured in a scuffle, and a burst water pipe flooded Voltaire Street. The big event was completely invisible. San Diego is a beautiful port city in southern California; it also hosts a huge US Navy base (above). At 12.03pm, ships in harbour conducted a routine electronic warfare exercise. An operator error meant that they accidentally started jamming signals from the Global Positioning System (GPS).

GPS is the ubiquitous technology behind Satellite Navigation systems, using signals from a constellation of satellites to pinpoint your location. It guides aircraft, ships, long-distance hikers and pizza deliveries. It is also an 'invisible utility', providing cheap and easy access to Coordinated Universal Time to synchronise electronic devices with each other, essential for telecommunications and power systems.

Within half an hour, the US Coastguard Center of Excellence for Navigation (NAVCEN) was receiving calls about GPS malfunctions. The commander of NAVCEN, one Captain Blizard, later delivered a report on the incident, described by Don Jewell, editor of *GPS World* as a “wake-up call” to warn people on the dangers of GPS jamming.[1]

The Navy's GPS warfare centre was unaware of the jamming incident

The report says that one medical paging system was knocked out for two hours, and that there was a widespread effect on the mobile phone system, with two cellphone towers shut down and 150 others affected. These systems rely on GPS timing to synchronise them. The GPS system used for maritime navigation was out of action for half an hour, and air traffic control systems were affected, though not dangerously.

Captain Blizard's report has never been released. NAVCEN referred me to the Department of Homeland Security, who would not comment. However, sections of the report have been published in other briefings, including one by the US Air Force's GPS Operations Center.[2]

The jamming probably affected some sat nav users. A number of bank cash machines reportedly stopped working; some of these also rely on the GPS time signal. After two hours, Navy personnel found that their own GPS was not working. They quickly made the connection with the exercise, and turned off the jammer.

However, it was some 72 hours before NAVCEN succeeded in tracing the source of the jamming that had produced all the complaints. Ironically enough, San Diego is also home to the Navy's GPS warfare centre, which was apparently unaware of the incident at the time. There was no publicity, and the incident was only officially reported to members of the industry some months later.

GPS is easy to jam because the satellite signal is so weak, comparable to a car headlight several thousand miles away. For £30 you can buy a GPS jammer from the Internet which is the size of a mobile phone and which can affect GPS receivers for several kilometres. Experts argue that a backup system is needed, and have lobbied for an extension of the land-based LORAN (LOng RAnge Navigation) system, which is effectively unjammable.

In the UK and Europe, governments are still considering whether to modernise LORAN, and it's now possible to get combined GPS/LORAN receivers. However, the US scrapped their LORAN network in 2010, saving $36m, a fraction of the cost of one GPS satellite.

When San Diego journalist Randy Dotinga tried this year to find out more about the jamming incident, he was met with a blank: “I contacted the port and the Federal Aviation Administration to ask about the problems it created. They said they had no idea what I was talking about. The Navy said it was mystified too.”[3]

Dotinga eventually talked to Gene Schlechte of NAVCEN, who confirmed that the incident had taken place but downplayed the effects with some carefully worded responses. He noted that air traffic control was not disrupted, though equipment might have been affected, and that there was no “widespread problem” in the port. Schlechte said that the cellphone networks did not report “loss of cell service to their customers” despite losing some transmitters. Instead of being a wake-up call, the incident was now being downgraded to nothing to be concerned about.

Schlechte did admit that a medical paging system went down, but declined to identify it. Other sources suggest that, ironically enough, it was at a Navy hospital close to the harbour.

The San Diego incident was a real-life 'stress test' showing how much trouble terrorists or others might cause with a jammer. Some have suggested that the jamming was done deliberately, and that may account for the secrecy. Others think that the results were an embarrassment to the official policy of shutting down LORAN. Or perhaps the Navy is keenly aware of how litigious people are and wants to avoid expensive lawsuits from anyone affected.

Looking ahead, we are relying increasingly on GPS, even when we know we should not. One cruise ship ran aground because the crew was using GPS without any other navigation aids, and light aircraft have crashed for the same reason. As a utility, GPS is needed for telecoms and power distribution networks, and jamming – accidental or deliberate – is likely to be a growing issue. While Europe may still have LORAN as a backup, the US has no safety net. In future years, we might regret that the lessons of San Diego 2007 were kept so quiet.

NOTES

[1] http://bit.ly/p6Dq2r (gpsworld.com).

[2] http://tinyurl.com/43u9nks (navcen.uscg.gov).

[3] http://bit.ly/loHllh (voiceofsandiego.org).

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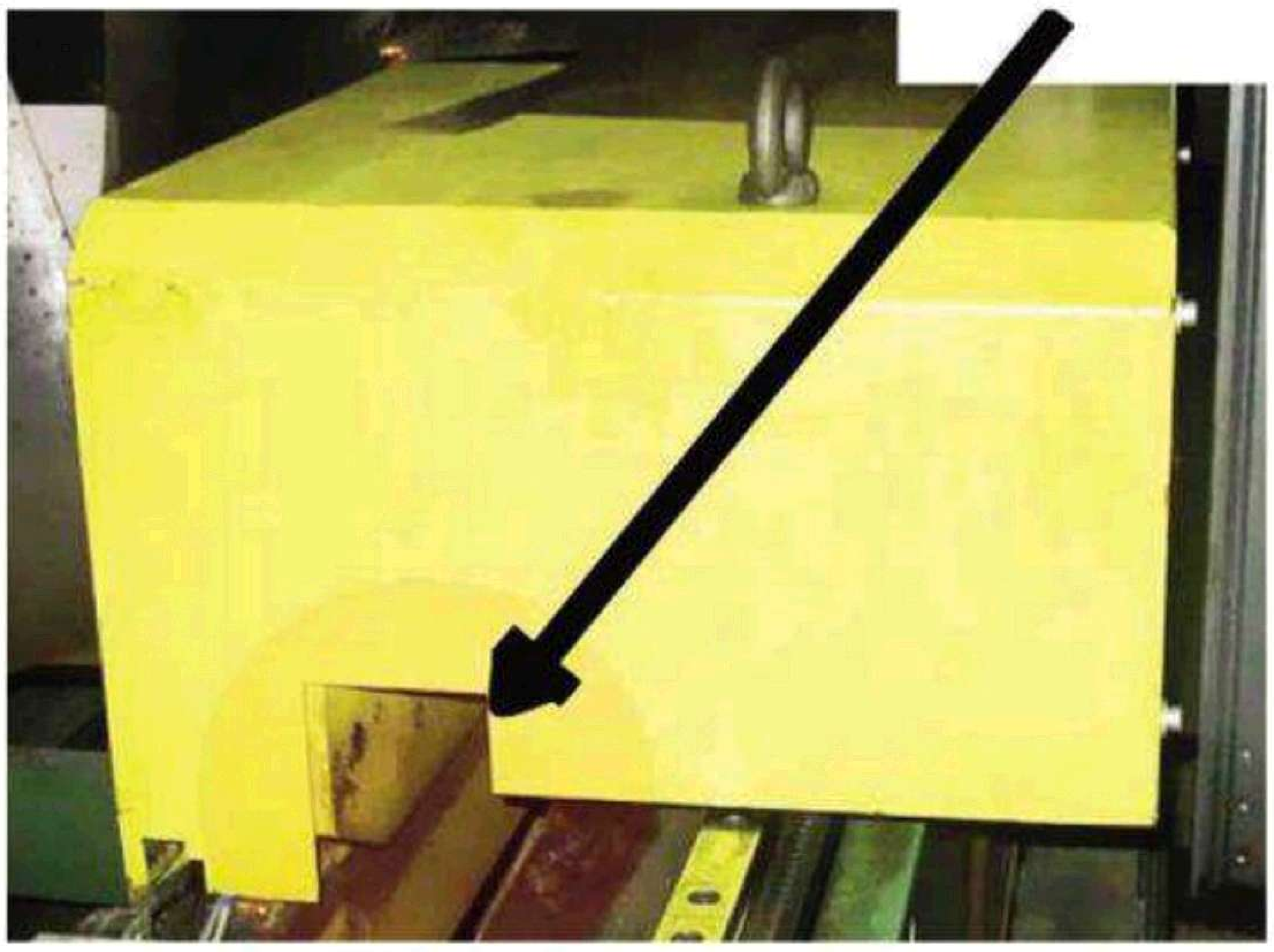
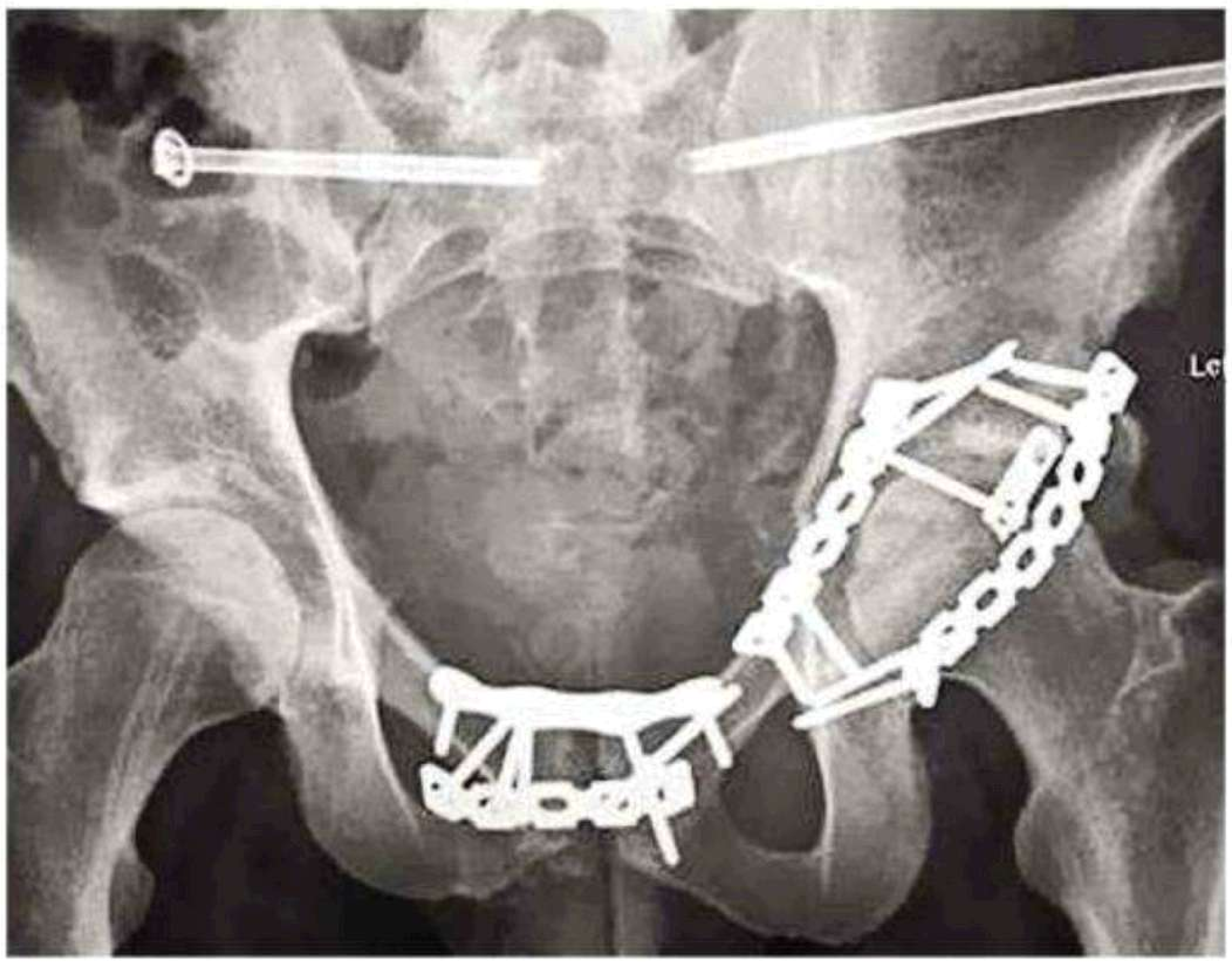


BEN LACK



BEN LACK

ABOVE LEFT: Matthew Lowe was caught in machinery and dragged through this tiny gap. **ABOVE RIGHT:** X-rays reveal the metal pins which put his crushed pelvis back together.

THE AMAZING GAP MAN

A factory worker cheated death by being dragged through a 5in (12.5cm) gap in a machine. Matthew Lowe, 25, suffered a broken back, pelvis, hips, ribs, and right arm, along with a ruptured stomach and bowel. His face turned purple and the whites of his eyes "electric red". His partner, mother to their five-year-old daughter, was told to "expect the worst" as she arrived to see him in hospital. "I don't know how I managed to survive," he said. "Luckily, my head went through a bigger gap before my body was dragged through a space no wider than a CD case." He was working as a welder at Compass Engineering, near his home in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, when the accident happened in December 2008. He was next to a conveyor that moved metal into the factory when his clothes got caught and he was pulled sideways towards the machinery. "I knew what was going to happen so I just relaxed and hoped for the best," he said. "The machine crushed my body, ripped my clothes to shreds and spat me out at the other end."

After six operations, his only visible injury now is a weakened right arm. X-rays show how much metal was used to bolt, plate and screw him back together. He is now training to be a site supervisor for Compass. His employer and the German company that installed the conveyor system faced Barnsley magistrates on 24 March this year accused of not fitting safety guards. *Metro, Sun, 24 Mar 2011.*

PROTECTED FROM HIMSELF

Like most small boys, Josh Hodgkiss (below) gets into lots of scrapes, but for the three-year-old this has included biting his tongue in half, giving himself a black eye and ripping out his toenails – because he can't feel pain. He was born with Smith-Magenis syndrome, a genetic disorder affecting one in 25,000 children. It means he has no concept of danger and his sleep patterns are reversed. He sleeps in a £10,000 padded tent provided by the local council to minimise the chances of him hurting himself, and his parents have spent a further £12,000 to adapt their house in Telford, Shropshire, to his needs. *Metro, 15 June 2011.*

CATERS NEWS AGENCY LTD

FOREIGN BODIES

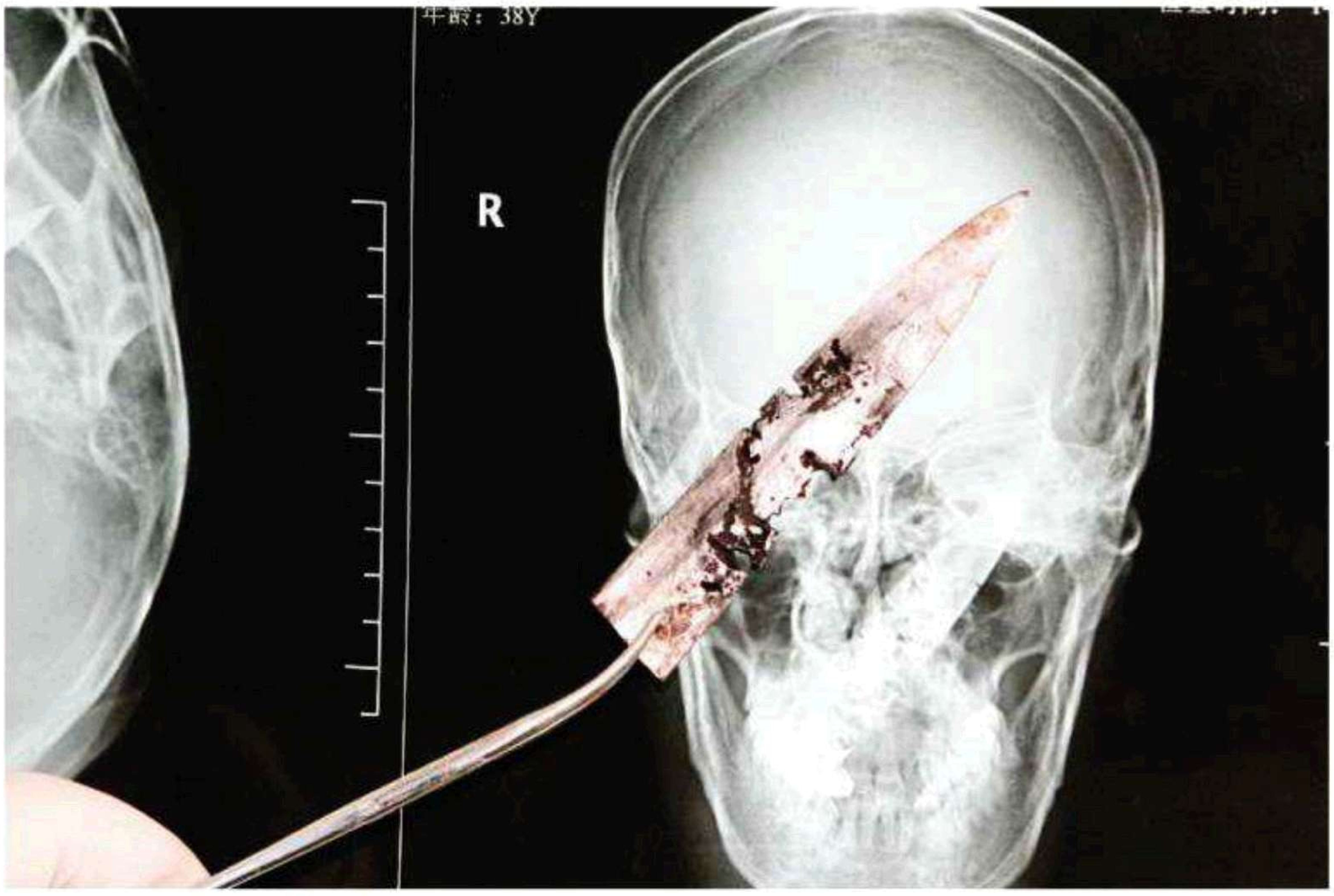
On 12 February, surgeons in southern China successfully removed a rusty 4in (10cm) knife from the skull of a man who said it had been stuck in there for more than four years. Li Fuyan, 30 (or 37), had been suffering from severe headaches, unexplained bleeding from ears and mouth, difficulty swallowing food, a hoarse voice and bad breath, but never knew the cause of his discomfort. He also occasionally spoke gibberish. In 2006, when he was working as a taxi driver, he had been robbed and stabbed in the lower right jaw by a robber. The blade broke off inside his head without anyone realising it.

Surgeons at the Yuxi City People's Hospital in Yunnan Province worked cautiously to remove the badly corroded blade without shattering it. "We checked his mouth, but no wound or scar was found," said Xu Wen, deputy director of the hospital's stomatology department. "It is very strange as to how the blade got into his head" (and even stranger that previous medical examinations had found no cause of the symptoms). Surgeon Luo Zhiwei said he had never seen anything so bizarre during his career. "This is a medical miracle," he said. "The knife was almost intact when we removed it." CCTV, the state broadcaster, showed footage of the rusted knife and interviewed Li, who said: "As time passed, I used injections to kill the pain in my head and ears."

"As soon as we scanned him it was obvious what was wrong," said a hospital spokesman. "What is astonishing is that it was missed four years ago and that he has survived all this time with it in his head. We've seen needles and small objects buried in a skull but never something this size." *dailymail.co.uk, 16 Feb; Metro, 17 Feb; [AP] 18 Feb 2011*.

Wang Tianqing, from northern China's Hebei province, was knocked unconscious in 1988 by a blow to the head. "I thought I'd been hit by a slingshot," he said. He was given anti-inflammatory drugs in hospital and sent home. Shortly afterwards, he started having epileptic seizures, which grew progressively worse. On a return trip to hospital after 23 years, a 2cm (¾in) bullet embedded in his brain was spotted on his CAT scan and removed. *telegraph.co.uk, 22 April 2011*.

The former president of South Korea was admitted to hospital with a bad cough only to end up on the operating table to remove a 7cm (2.8in) acupuncture needle from his right lung. Roh Tae-woo, 78, a retired general who served as president from 1988 to 1993, had been in poor health since 2002 when he received surgery for prostate cancer. It was a mystery how the needle ended up in his lung; acupuncturists said that none of their procedures involved penetrating the lung. A later media report stated that the needle came from an unlicensed acupuncturist trained under Kim Nam-Soo, 96. Despite Mr Kim's celebrity as an acupuncturist, the Association of Korean Oriental Medicine does not consider him a licensed practitioner. Mr Kim said he had not performed acupuncture on Mr Roh since 1993. *D.Telegraph, 4 May; [AFP] 13 May 2011*.



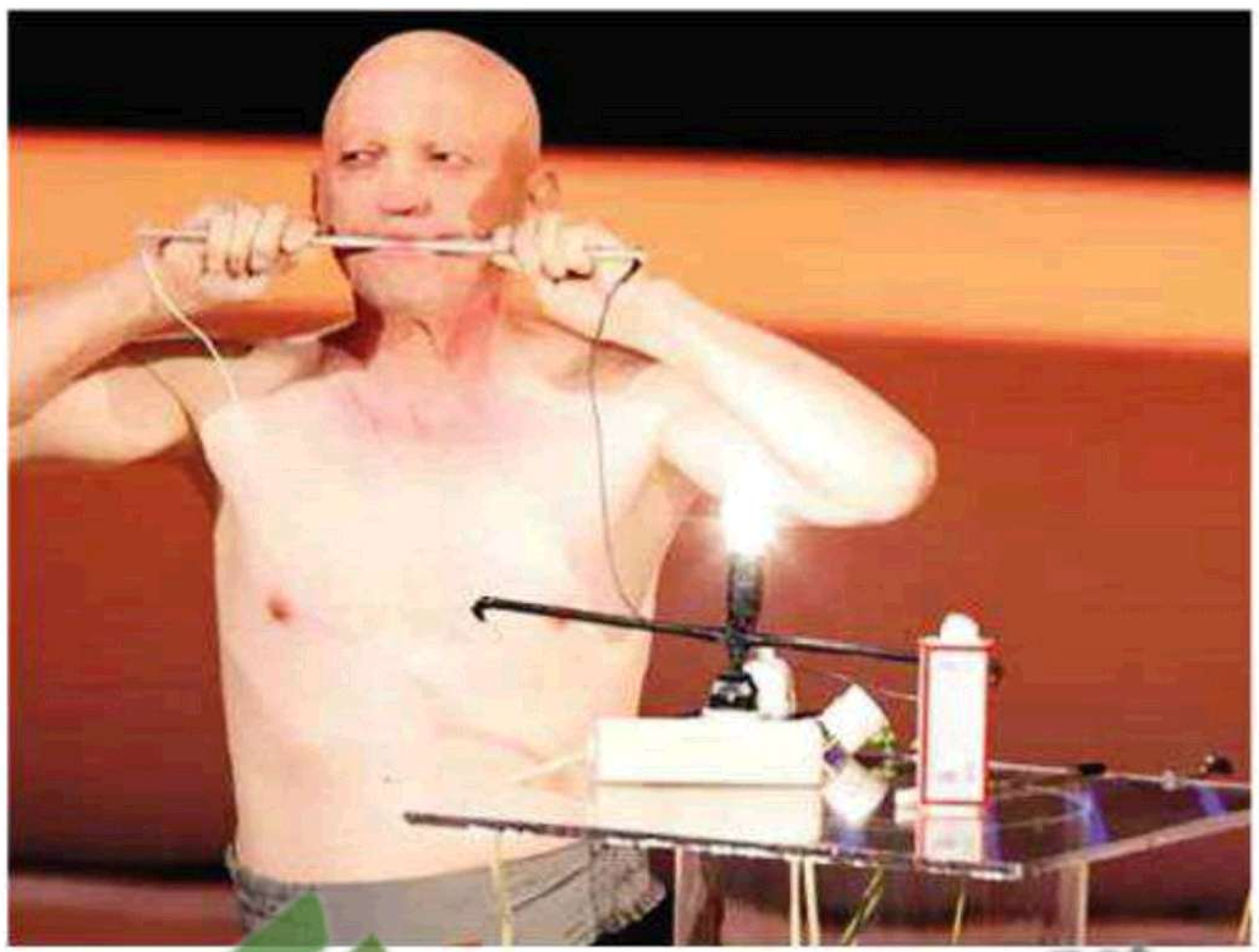
ABOVE: Surgeons removed this 4in (10cm) snapped-off knife blade from the skull of Li Fuyan, a Chinese taxi-driver.

REX FEATURES / QUIRKY CHINESE NEWS

Ove Sohlberg, 65, who complained of stomach pains for 25 years, was found to have a 5.8cm (2.3in) piece of wood, resembling a toothpick with sharp edges, lodged in his bowels. Doctors in Lycksele, Sweden, who removed the object on 18 June, suspected it had been left in his body after surgery for stomach ulcers in 1986. "I have been admitted to hospital more than 100 times over the years for the pain," said Mr Sohlberg. "I felt like there was something in there." *[UPI] 23 June 2011*.

HUMAN CONDUCTOR

Slavisa Pajkic, 54, (below) a Serbian machinist, is known as "Battery Man" as he can withstand high voltages without feeling a thing. Online videos show him powering up a light bulb and cooking sausages, apparently by using energy stored in his body. He can also set alcohol-soaked things ablaze just be touching them. He set his first Guinness World record in 1983, when he allowed a current of 20,000 volts to pass through his body; then in 2003, he became the quickest man to heat up a cup of water to 97°C (207°F), taking one minute and 37 seconds. He hopes to set a third world record by charging up with a million-volt power generator and shooting lasers from his fingers. "I will try to become a wireless laser man," he said. This seems far-fetched, but Pajkic's abilities are genuine and he's using them to help people suffering from migraine, sinus and back problems.



Pajkic, from Pozarevac county, was 17 when he accidentally discovered his amazing talent. It was raining and his friends were making a metal fence, which somehow became live. "My friend, who was leaning against the fence, said he could feel electricity but when I approached and touched the wet spot, I felt nothing," said Pajkic. "I was open-mouthed, but then I realised that current could not harm my body. When there is a sudden power failure, my folks do not have to worry. My house is always shining. I can be an insulator, conductor, accumulator and heater. People have seen me on television so they are glad to meet me but afraid to shake hands."

Biba, as his friends know him, says electricity has no friends except for him. So far, scientists have been unable to account for his electrical immunity. Some speculate that because of a genetic defect, he has no sweat and salivary glands, and current isn't passing through his body, but passes on the outside of his skin, which acts as natural insulation. *odditycentral.com, 13 May; dailmail.co.uk, 13 June; MX News (Sydney), 14 June 2011*.

USO SPOTTING

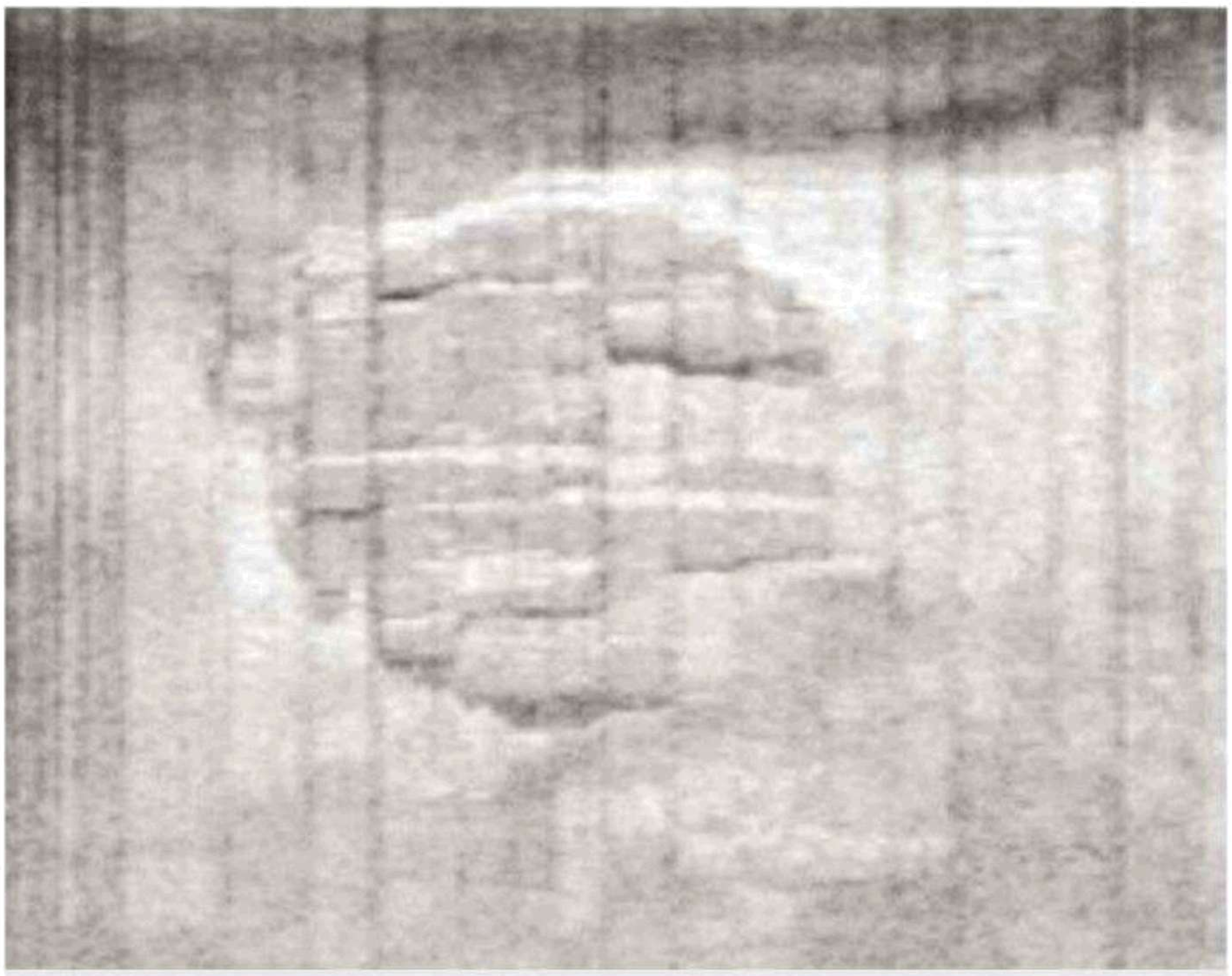
There's something in the water – apparent unexplained vehicles have been bothering Sweden's Navy for decades

Earlier this year, a quarrel seemed to be brewing between the Swedish Armed Forces (Försvaret) and its former Supreme Commander Bengt Gustafsson concerning a wrecked Soviet submarine found in coastal waters south of Gotland. The Armed Forces could see no point in further examining the sub, while Gustafsson thought the wreck might shed new light on the submarine chases of the 1980s. The West claimed the vessels were all Soviet, probing the country's defences. A Swedish parliamentary inquiry noted evidence found on the seabed of submarine "midgets with bottom-crawling capacity of a hitherto unknown character". As late as 1988, Ingvar Carlsson, the Swedish prime minister, warned the USSR: "Blood will flow. We will use all available methods… to sink the submarines… Our borders are holy." (There were more than 4,000 reported detections of foreign subs in Swedish waters in 1982–92 – See **FT42:7–8, 49:63–64, 50:72–73, 51:26–30, 60:64, 61:32–33, 67:50–51, 82:32–33.**)

The submarine was discovered in the autumn of 2009 by a marine survey company called Marin Mätteknik (MMT) and was examined during several dives in 2010. It is believed to be a 76m (250ft) Whiskey-class sub, a type often mentioned in the Swedish sub chases of the 1980s. Whiskey subs were common in the Soviet fleet then, and it was also a Whiskey (W-137) that ran aground near Karlskrona in October 1981, an episode dubbed "Whiskey on the Rocks".

Bo Rask, chief of staff at the Swedish Naval Tactical Command, argued that enough was known about the wreck just from looking at the pictures taken by MMT. "We can see it hasn't sunk from any damage from a weapon, which is all we need to know," he said. Ola Oskarsson, head of MMT, disagreed: "A submarine has two surfaces, one external and one internal. A depth charge wouldn't affect the external layer, which means you wouldn't be able to see the damage from outside." According to Rask, the Armed Forces will look into the wreck eventually – "but there is no hurry, we know of many abandoned submarines along the Swedish coastline." (He makes it sound as if the coast is littered with wrecked Russian subs.)

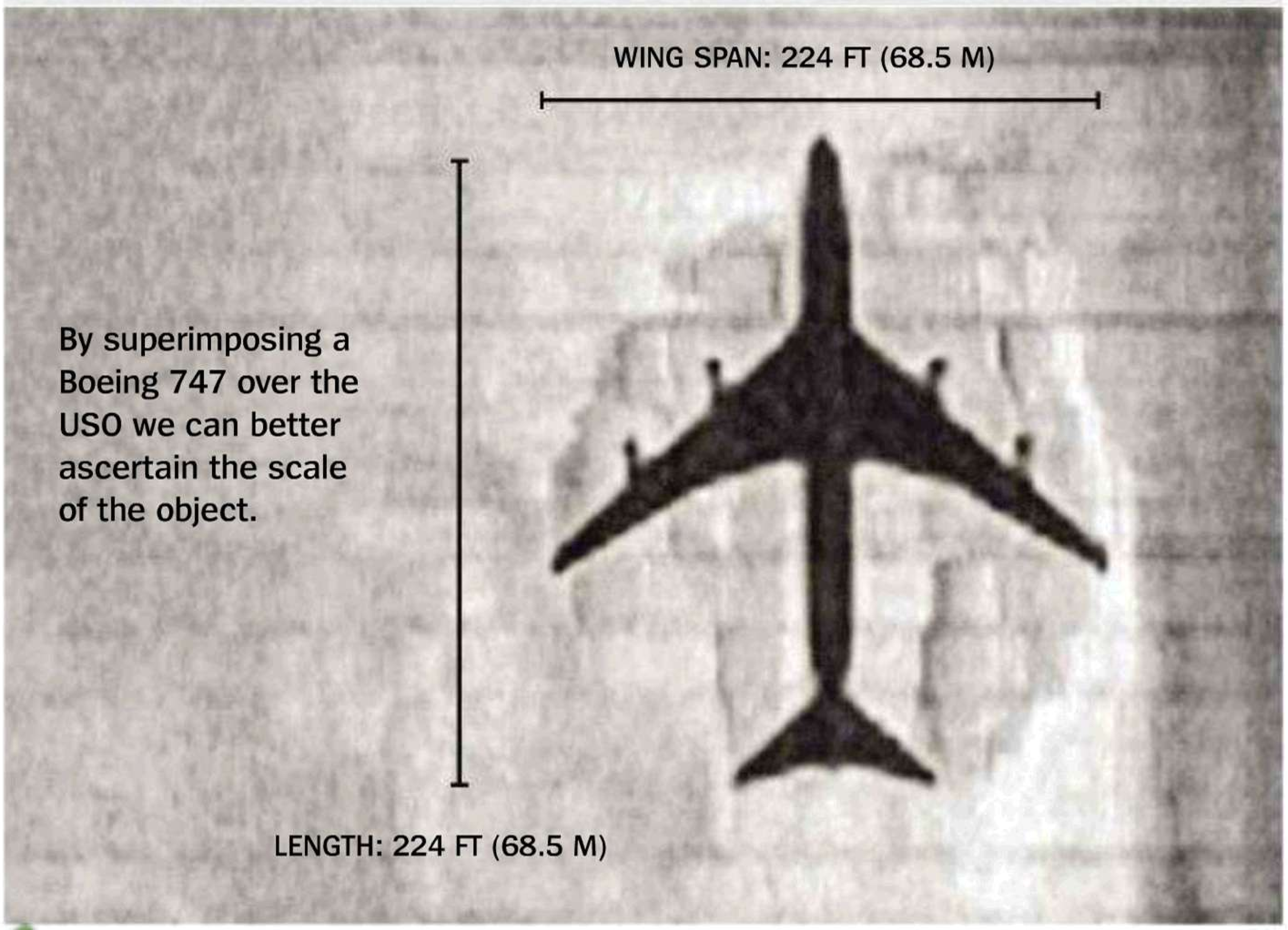
Gustafsson is more impatient. According to him, we must find out what sub it is and why it sank. He suspects that it is identical to a certain Whiskey sub discovered off the island of Utö in the spring of 1981, which was attacked by the destroyer *Halland* – in which case it might have a dead crew of 60



PETER LINDBERG/ DENNIS ÅSBERG/OCEANEXPLORER.SE

BALTIC SUBMARINE MYSTERIES

A sonar scan by a Swiss marine exploration team has revealed a USO (unidentified submarine object) on the seabed 300ft (90m) down in the Gulf of Bothnia between Sweden and Finland. The divers were looking for alcohol in a Swedish merchant ship sunk by the Germans in World War I. Team leader Peter Lindberg said of the image: "I have never seen anything like it." The circular object looked a bit like Han Solo's *Star Wars* spaceship the *Millennium Falcon*. The seabed around the 'craft' had been scarred, suggesting it had tried to move around. *MX News (Sydney), Sun, 2 Aug 2011*.



By superimposing a Boeing 747 over the USO we can better ascertain the scale of the object.

PETER LINDBERG/ DENNIS ÅSBERG/OCEANEXPLORER.SE men and some nuclear torpedoes on board. Rask, however, suggests that it is a discarded sub bound for scrapping. In the 1990s, some Whiskey subs were towed to Spain to be dismantled. Why this one ended up south of Gotland is not explained – but it wouldn't be the first time that Russians had misnavigated. *The Local (Sweden), 3 Mar; Sydsvenskan, 4 Mar 2011.*

There was a great USO (unidentified submarine object) "flap" in 1983 and Swedish ships regularly dropped depth charges into Baltic waters throughout the 1980s. There were also frequent periscope and frogman sightings. Some regarded the USOs as extraterrestrial: perhaps travellers from a watery planet were exploring the seabed for intelligent life. Others saw them as a modern variation of the water monsters of Nordic folklore.

Research has shed light on some of the 1980s submarine mysteries. New technology has shown that a recording lasting almost four minutes, made by the Swedish military during a submarine hunt on 12 October 1982 and thought to be that of a Soviet sub, was in fact the sound of the *Amalia*, a Swedish charter boat that happened to be in the vicinity. A test recording of the boat's working propeller was made in April 2008, and shown to be identical – though the 1982 recording also included a so-called 'ping' sound from a hydrophone, which might have come from an underwater microphone deployed by a foreign vessel, according to Carl Bildt, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. *The Local (Sweden), 19+20 May; Russia Today, 23 May 2008.*

A number of the intrusions into Swedish waters in the 1980s were allegedly carried out by the US and the UK, partly to train submarine crews, partly to keep Swedish defences on their toes, and partly as a psychological operation. One of the British vessels used was *HMS Orpheus*, a submarine kitted out for SBS (Special Boat Service) operations. These intrusions were among the most secret operations authorised by the US and UK governments, and lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Sir Keith Speed, who was the British Navy minister from 1979 to 1981, said that top Swedish commanders were consulted before intrusions. The rest of the Swedish Armed Forces and the government were apparently kept in the dark. "I cannot say any more as I am bound by the Official Secrets Act until the day I die," said Speed. Last year, former US defense secretary Caspar Weinberger told a Swedish TV news show about US training missions in Swedish waters, which could explain why no sub was ever forced to the surface. Subsequent fury in the Swedish press was not directed at the Western powers, but at the naval top brass for keeping politicians uninformed. Retired Swedish admirals have hotly denied the claims, so there is much that still needs clarification. *Sunday Times, 27 Jan 2008; Engineering & Technology magazine, 7 Aug–10 Sept 2010.*

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

146. ROSA PARKS

HUNT EMERSON

The myth

On 1 December 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, a middle-aged black commuter was too exhausted to give up her bus seat to a white man, as the law required. Her subsequent arrest sparked a mass boycott of the bus company; thus, a spontaneous act of defiance by an ordinary downtrodden woman led to the end of American apartheid.

The "truth"

One of the great heroes of the struggle for democracy in the USA, Rosa Parks (1913–2005) was in fact a political and religious activist, who'd been campaigning for workers' rights and racial equality since the 1930s. She was a branch secretary in the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and had attended the training centre for union and civil rights leaders, the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. At the time of the bus boycott, she was active in the Montgomery Improvement Association, which was looking for a test case to dramatise the fight against bus segregation. She wasn't old or tired that day, Parks later wrote, just "tired of giving in". The process of sanitisation – by which people once viewed as dissidents are, when their campaigns end in success, hastily co-opted into the national narrative as depoliticised "pioneers" – is a familiar one. Parks went on to be awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, and has had streets renamed in her honour. In 1999, President Clinton praised her as "this one citizen" who – somewhat bizarrely – represented the triumph of "free enterprise over state socialism".

Sources

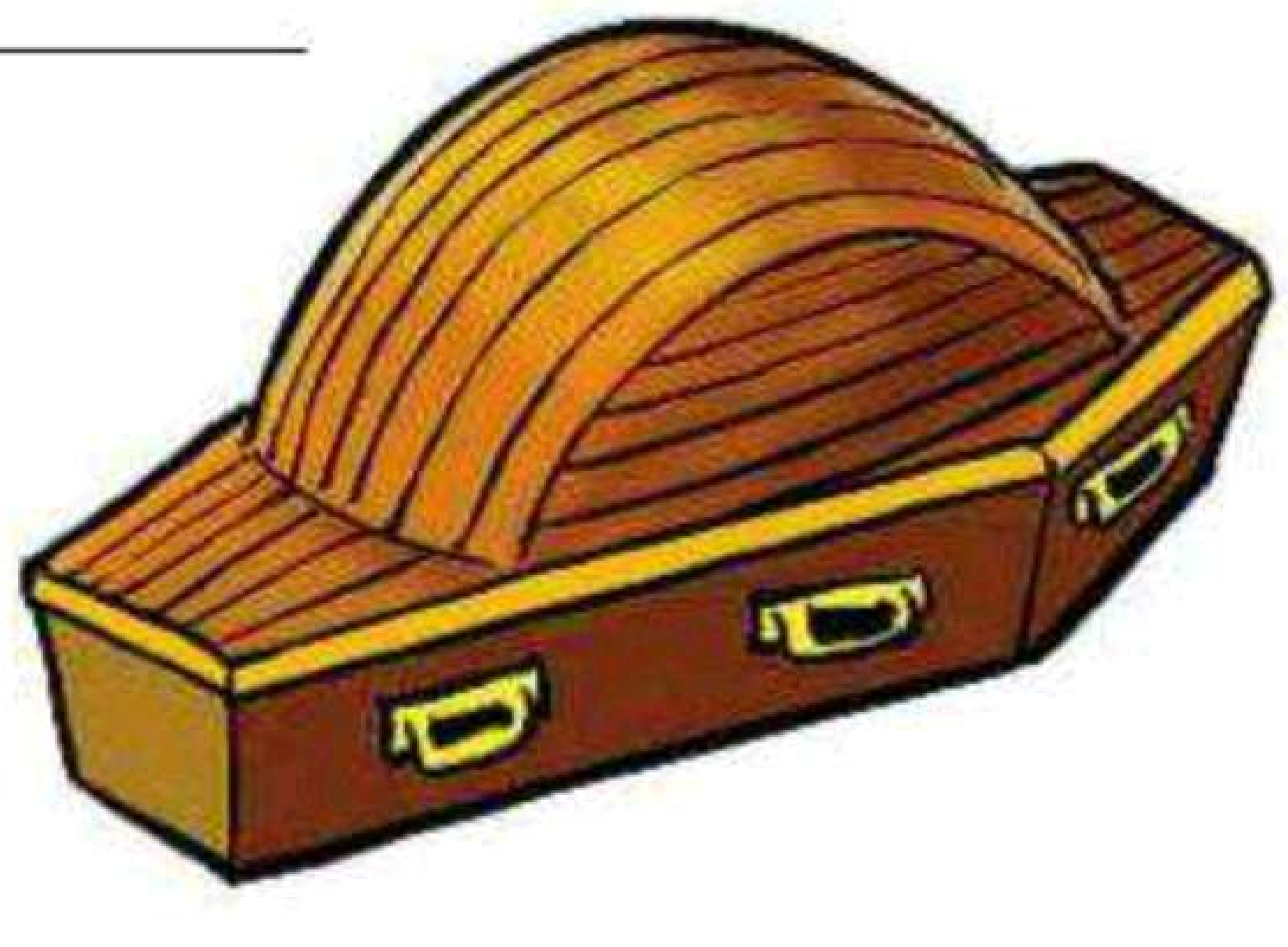
Morning Star, 14 Nov 1997 + 17 June 1999; *D.Mirror*, 10 Nov 2001; *The Socialist* (journal of The Socialist Party USA) July/Aug 2000; http://bit.ly/nlTub2 (spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk); http://bbc.in/qotbSS (BBC); http://bit.ly/fCKaTa (thehenryford.org/); www.rosaparks.org

Disclaimer

Many aspects of Parks's courageous protest remain controversial amongst historians; corrections and further thoughts are welcome aboard the letters page.

Mythchaser

Here's a nice, simple question for my well-rounded readership: is it "true" that thinness is a more significant indicator of mortality than fatness?



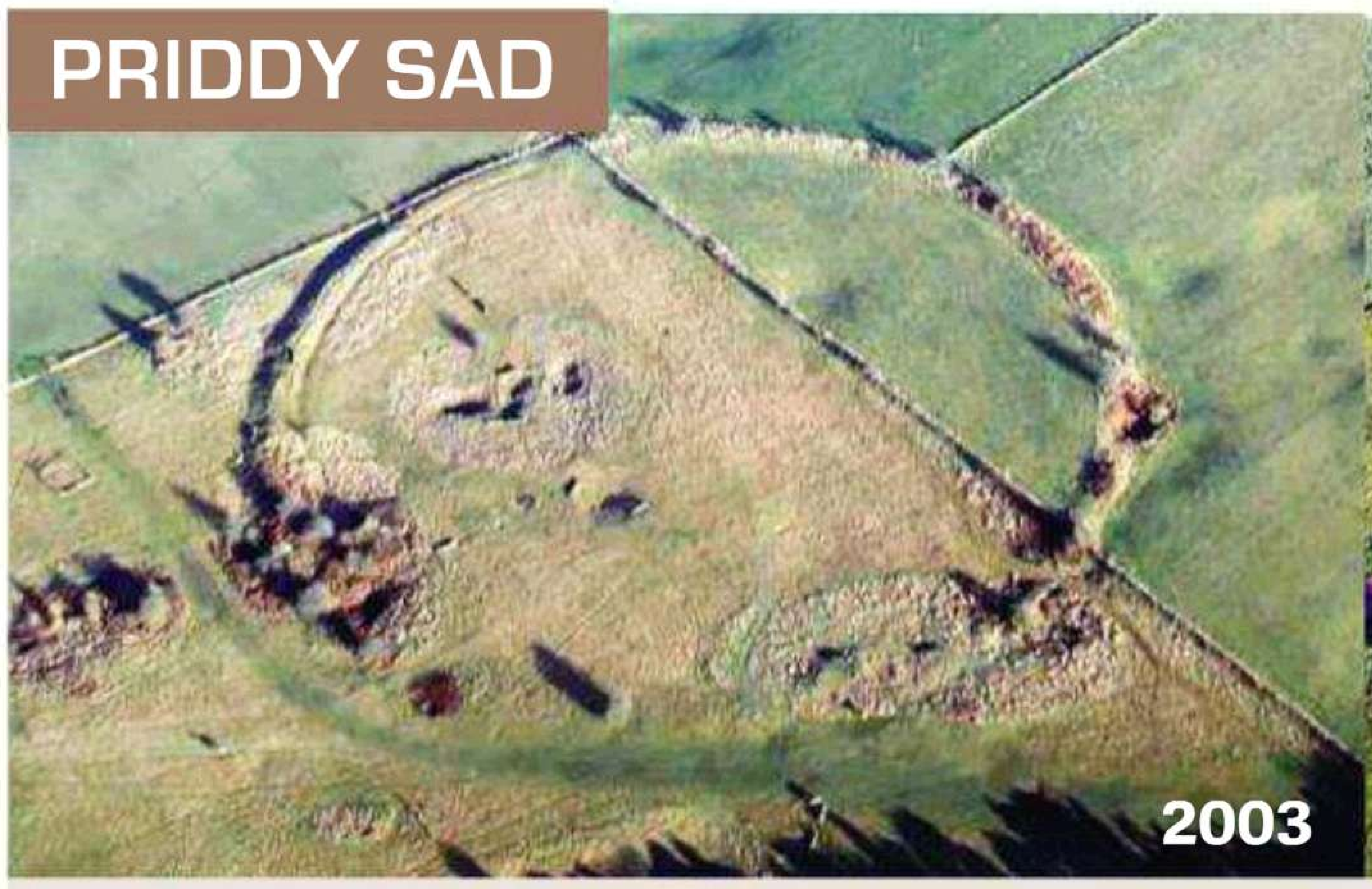
FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

MATT PATTINSON

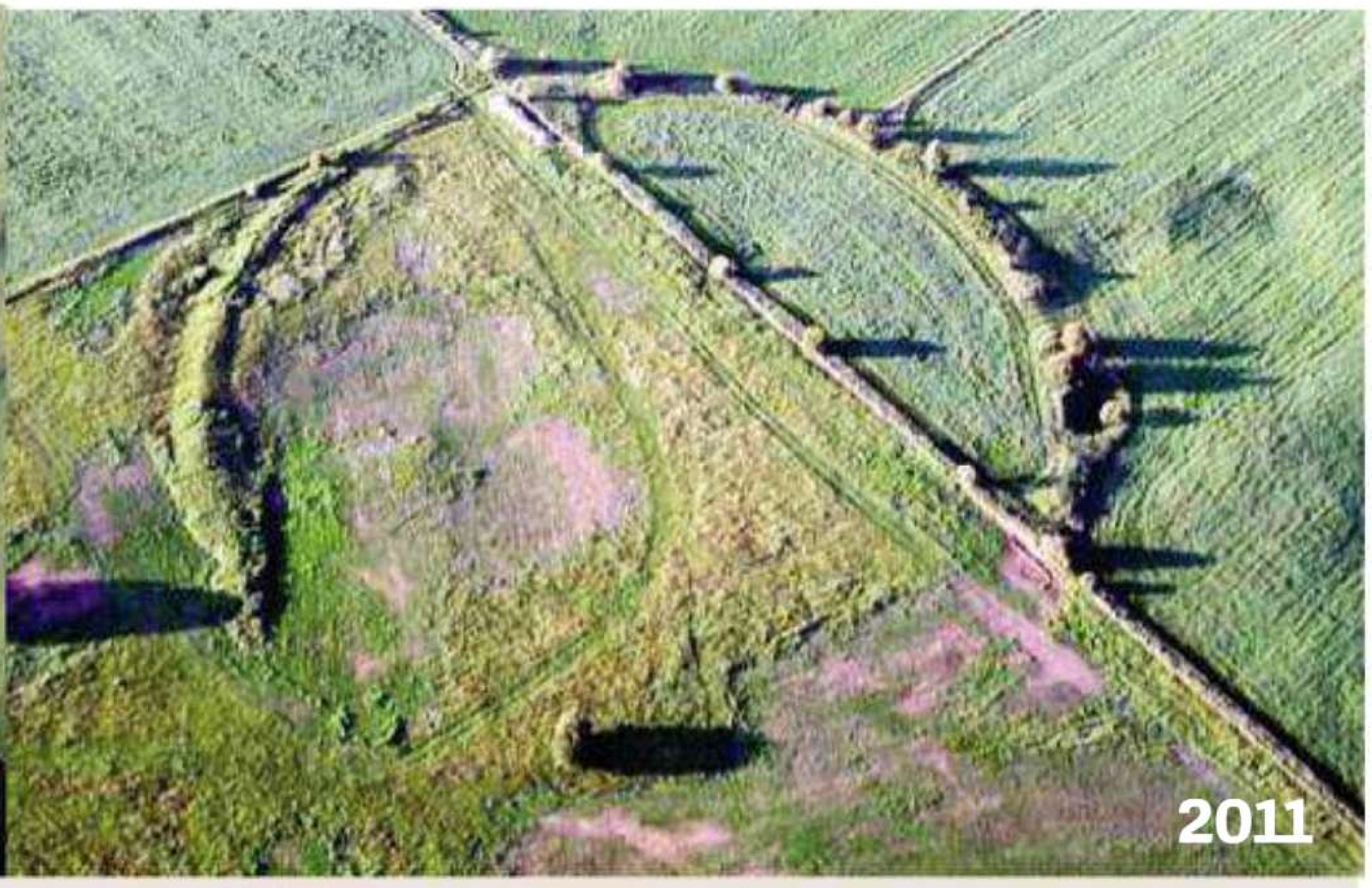
ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, a founding co-editor of the peer-review *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.bergpublishers.com).

PRIDDY SAD



2003



2011

PETE GLASTONBURY

Set within a rich Neolithic landscape atop Somerset's Mendip Hills are the enigmatic Priddy Circles. Three of these giant earthwork enclosures are regularly spaced in a straight line, with the fourth (unfinished) one slightly off that axis further north. They stretch in all for over 1km (1,094yds). The circles comprise ditches with interior banks made of stones, clay and turf, which were retained by a double line of posts and stakes. The enclosures are highly reminiscent of henge monuments (henges are circular earthen ditches inside a bank), but, dating to c.3000 BC, they probably predate true henges and are thus unique features. Utterly mysterious, they hold much information yet to be fully gleaned by archæological investigation.

And this is why it is all the more appalling that they have been severely vandalised. Sometime in May this year, the landowner is alleged to have used earth-moving equipment to bulldoze away the entire south-western arc of the southernmost circle. The banks were flattened and the ditch infilled. The Priddy Circles are scheduled ancient monuments, and to damage such features is, plain and simple, illegal. English Heritage (EH) has examined the damage, we understand, and is under pressure from various quarters, including local MP Tessa Munt, to pursue this matter in the courts.

If you want to become more involved, as we hope every reader of this column would want to be, there is a Facebook group, "protectthepriddycircles", and a petition has been set up to pressurise appropriate authorities like EH to be active in bringing to book vandals who damage ancient monuments in general (and where, incidentally, you'll see comments about other sites being damaged and alleged EH tardiness or poor judgment): http://bit.ly/qLk7Hr (petitionbuzz.com). The National Trust is also instigating a campaign to protect our heritage. You know what they say: When it's gone, it's gone. Forever. *Past Horizons, 16 July 2011, and thanks to Pete Glastonbury and Robert Moore.*

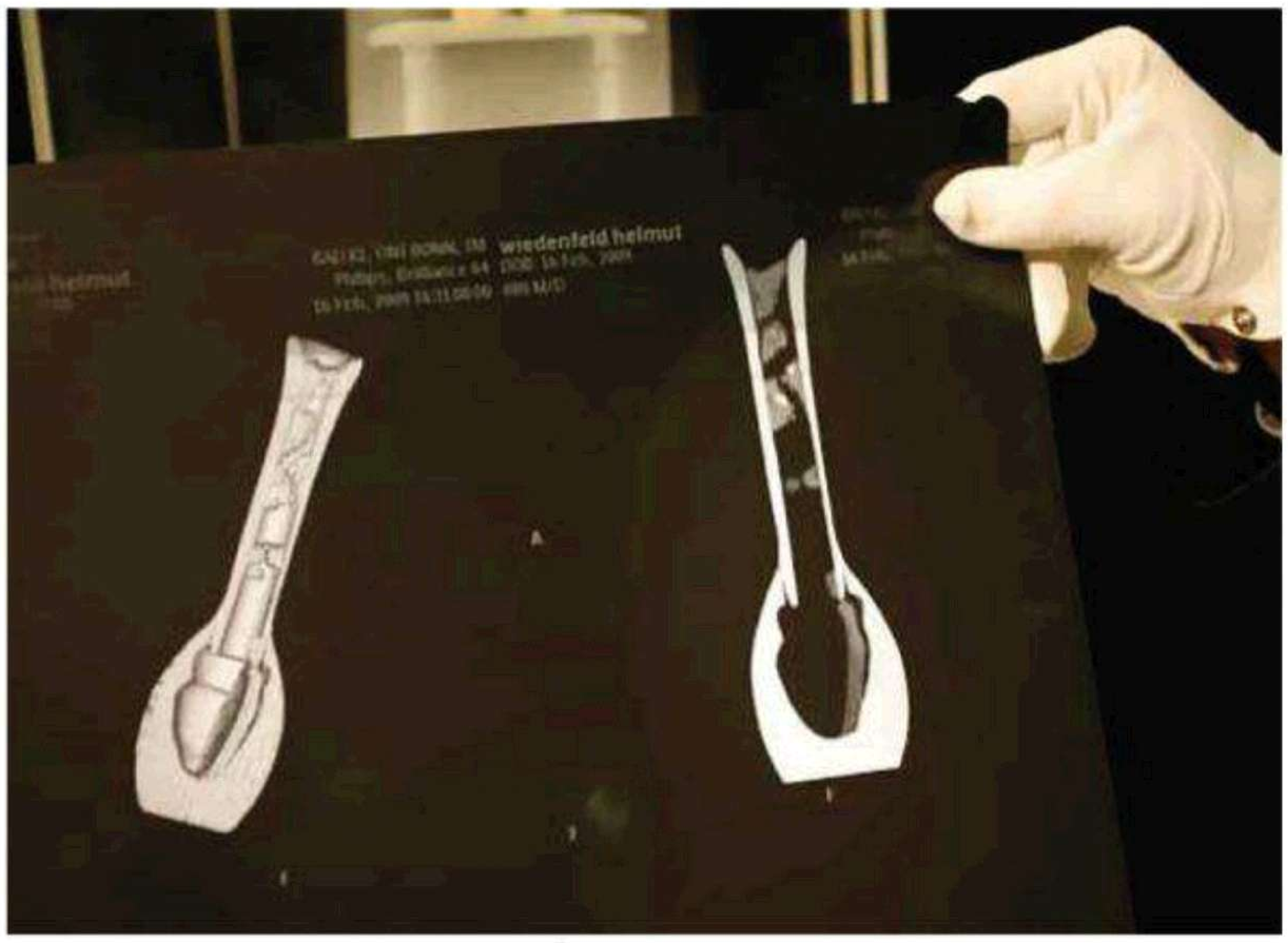
2003

PETE GLASTONBURY

SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS

Hatshepsut was a female pharaoh who lived c.1450 BC; her mortuary temple is a remarkable complex of buildings at the foot of a cliff at Deir el-Bahri near the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. Among recovered items belonging to her was a vessel that for the past 30 years was assumed to contain perfume – but recently German researchers have taken a closer look at the item. The clay stopper was still intact, and a CAT scan showed that inside there was residue of a dried-up liquid.

RIGHT: This small clay vessel from Hatsepshut's mortuary temple contained a toxic medicinal ointment.



BOTH PHOTOS: EGYPTIAN MUSEUM/UNIVERSITY OF BONN

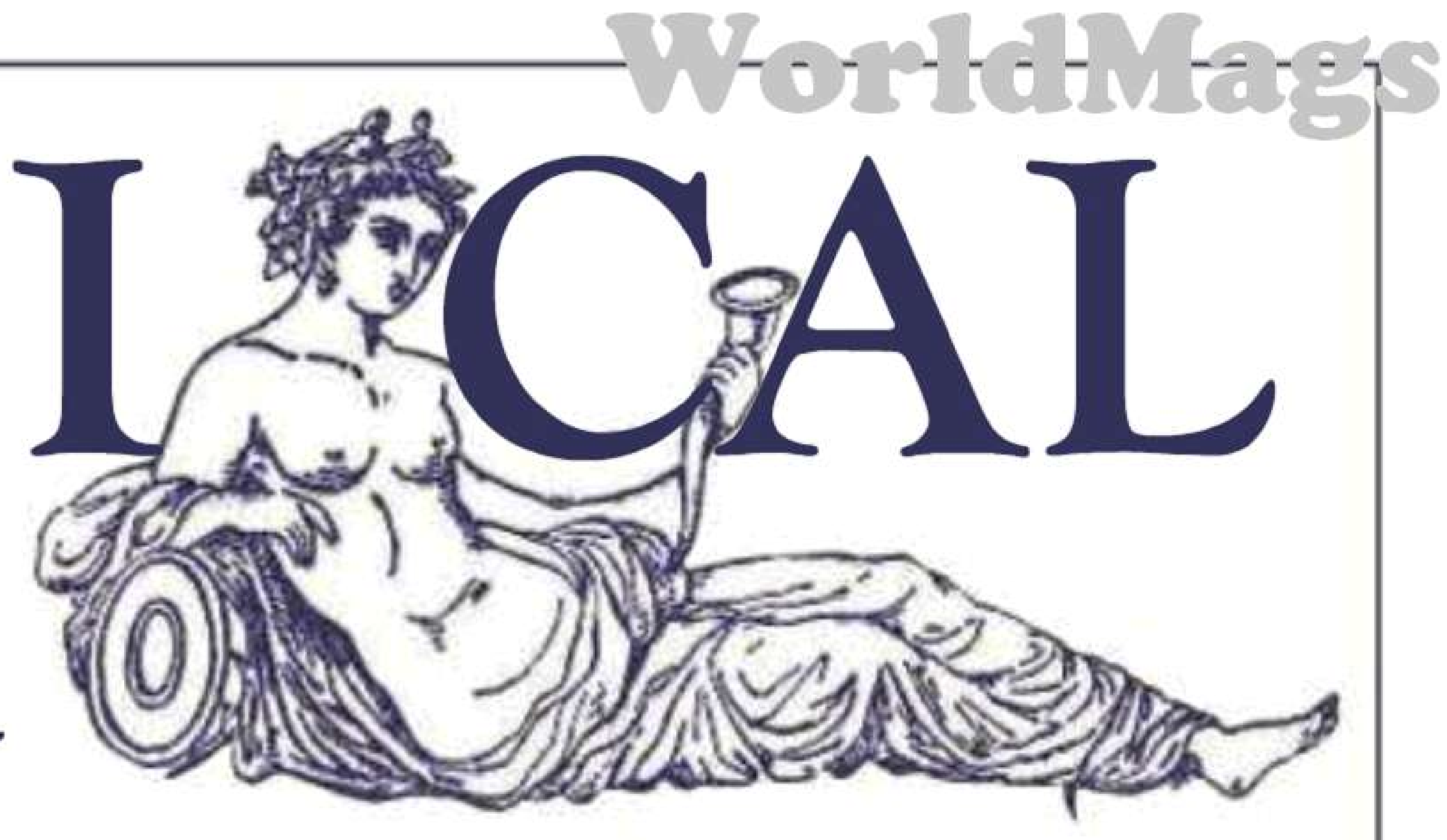
By means of an endoscope, a sample of the substance was extracted from the vessel and subjected to chemical analysis.

It turns out that it wasn't perfume but an ointment, far too greasy to have been used for cosmetic purposes. Rather, it seems to have been medication for a skin disease such as eczema, and Egyptologists know there were cases of skin diseases in Hatshepsut's family. Further analysis showed that the ointment contained a range of ingredients, including the chemical benzo(a) pyrene, one of the most carcinogenic substances known (it is in cigarette smoke, for instance). It is known Hatshepsut suffered from cancer, so the researchers now think that if she was regularly using this carcinogenic lotion due to a chronic skin condition, it may have led to her demise. "Egyptian physicians were general practitioners and good surgeons," observes one of the researchers, Dr Wiedenfeld, "but they were lousy internists." *Past Horizons (www.pasthorizonspr.com), 19 Aug 2011.*

NEEDED LIKE A HOLE IN THE HEAD

Here's some different news relating to Libya. In the psychedelic era of the 1960s, trepanation (drilling a hole in the cranium) was being touted as a way of getting perpetually high (didn't really work, say some of this columnist's hole-y friends), but was practised as a medical technique by several early peoples – ancient Andeans, Egyptians and others [**FT58:42–47**]. Now another culture can be added to that list: Cambridge University researchers have been examining holes in the skulls belonging to three male adults from the Garamantian people whose culture flourished 3,000–1,500 years ago in the nowadays southern Libyan region of the Sahara Desert [see **FT176:24**]. The perceived purpose of ancient trepanation isn't fully understood, but relief from severe headaches is one likely possibility (and maybe, even, in some cases, to treat supposed spirit possession). *ScienceNews, 17 Aug 2011.*

CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

142. GOLDEN OLDIES

"The wilder, luminous music in Plato..." – Fort, *Books*, p315.

Pre-Byzantine musical notation is scant, thus reconstruction is largely dancing in the dark. But there is enough literary evidence to get a sense of classical hit parades.

Homer (*Iliad*, bk9 v189) depicts Achilles singing of "men's glorious deeds" to his rapt tent-mate Patroclus – sounds like a middle-class student 'revolutionary' strumming endless choruses of 'Guantanamara'. The *Odyssey* (bk12. v76) mentions "The Argo which all sing" – obviously Number One on the Bronze Age charts.

Aristophanes (dis)credits Euripides with a new dance hit, 'The Shake', well before The Swinging Blue Jeans. His audience may well have left the theatre whistling this play's nonsense song 'Tofhratothratophrat' and frogs' 'Brekekekekoaxkoax' – precursors of Right, Said Fred and Mr Blobby (*Frogs*, vv209–68, 1261–1314).

Plato, *Republic*, bk3 paras398–401 distinguishes between 'good' (martial Dorian) and 'bad' (decadent Ionian) music, perhaps the first demarcation line between classical and pop. His denunciation of the latter is along the lines every teenager has heard from the grown-ups.

British squaddies are famous for 'Hitler has only got one ball' and suchlike martial ditties. Their Roman counterparts were licensed to slag off their triumphing generals in songs that the general public probably picked up. Suetonius's *Life of Cæsar* (ch51) provides the best example:

"Home we bring the bald whoremonger/Romans, lock your wives away/All the Roman gold you sent him/Went his Gallic tarts to pay" – Robert Graves's translation.

Horace (*Satires*, bk1 no2 vv1–3) maliciously portrays low-class Roman grief at the death of the singer Tigellius – you almost expect the wreaths and teddy bears to start piling up at his door. This warbler had one high-class fan, Cicero (*Letters to his Friends*, bk7. no24), also an homonymous relative who also performed – Rome's Oasis?

Juvenal (*Satire* 6 vv63–5) thunders against girls and women who wet themselves while listening to their favourite stars, a damp combination of Roman Beatlemania and the ladies who used to throw their panties at Tom Jones (that green, green ass of home).

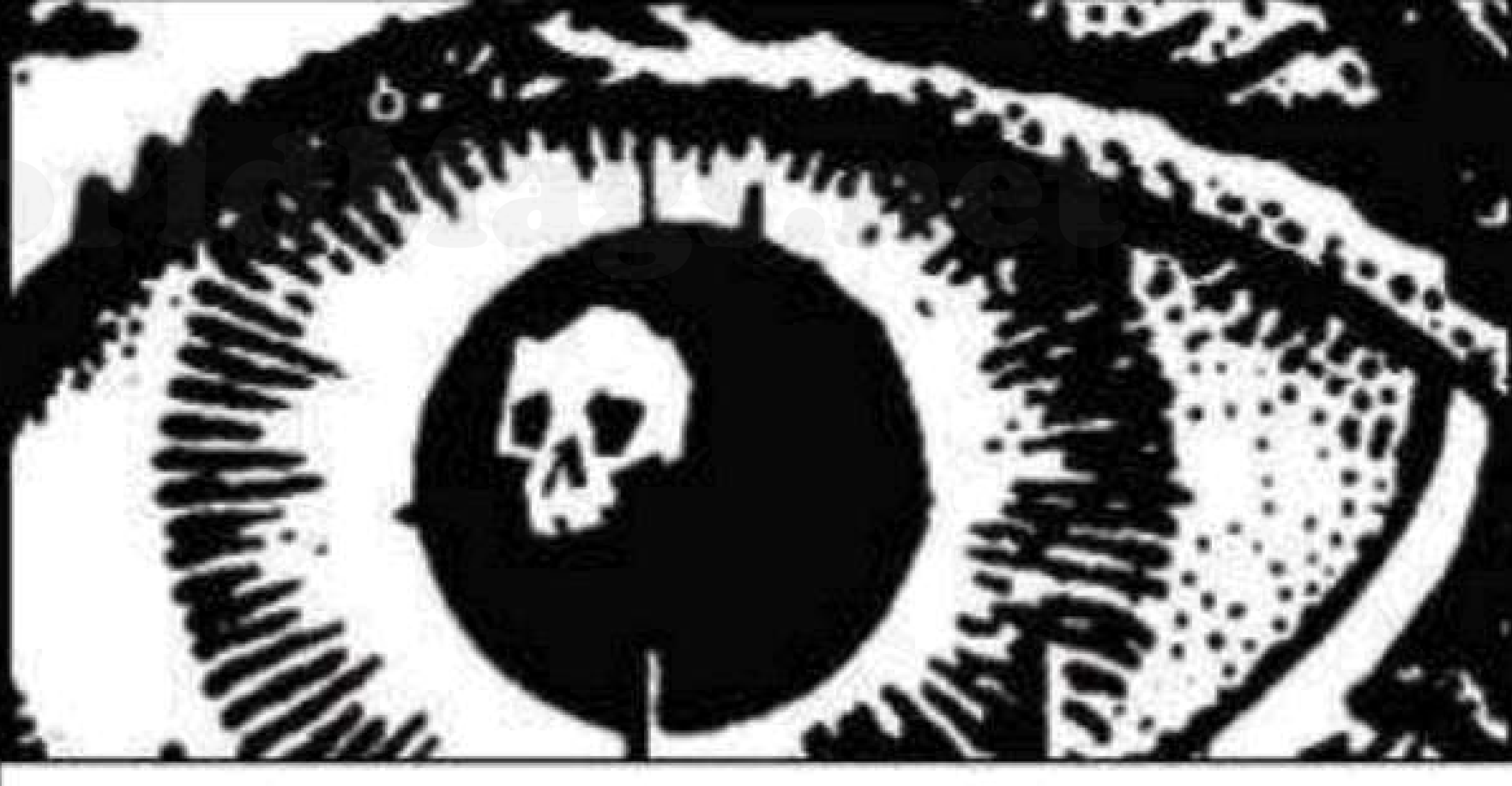
Trimalchio, the self-made millionaire host in Petronius's comic novel *Satyricon* (ch73 para3), assaults his guests' ears by "murdering the songs of Menecrates", the latter being a musical idol of the age (Suetonius, *Nero*, ch30) – this could well be the first record of a karaoke performance. This may or may not (modern opinion varies sharply) be a dig at Rome's greatest (in his own estimation) star of them all. The singing-strumming emperor would be pleased at his 1960s reincarnation by the American group Nero and the Gladiators. Suetonius's *Life* (chs20–25) provides a detailed account, supplemented by Tacitus (*Annals*, bk14 chs14–15; bk15 ch34) and pseudo-Lucian, *Nero*, chs6–10, this last asserting that he once cut out a rival performer's vocal chords – this would have been an effective scene in *Espresso Bongo*.

Nero began by coaching from pop mæstro Terpnus. To strengthen his weak, husky voice, he underwent a regimen of purgings and vomitings and lying with lead weights on his chest. For concerts, a voice-coach was always in the dressing room with advice. Despite the presence of hired claques (nicknamed 'Bees', 'Bricks', and 'Roof-tiles' – Roman 'roadies') to ensure endless Bravos and Encores, he was a nervous performer, especially if he noticed the more captive than captivated audience members who jumped from the theatre wall or feigned death to escape. His début performance at Naples was enhanced by the theatre's sudden collapse just after everyone had left. After exhausting Italian audiences, Nero embarked on a concert tour of the major Greek festivals, winning 1808 first-prizes – puts Michael Jackson's Victory Tour in the shade. In return for their tactful verdicts, the Greeks were given a decade of tax exemptions – artistic stimulus packages. Apart from his famous 'Burning of Troy' intoned over the great Rome fire of AD 64 (Nero, of course, did not fiddle, and Stradivarius was not a Roman emperor), Nero's versatile (he also fancied himself an ace charioteer) hits included 'Canace in Labour' (a Greek mythological heroine pregnant by her brother), 'Orestes the Matricide' (tactless choice for one who bumped off his own Queen Mum), and 'Hercules Mad', this last so well staged that a young soldier rushed the stage to lend aid.

Arius, eponymous provoker of the first major Christian doctrinal schism, preached his theological message in an elaborate song entitled 'Thaleia' ('Banquet'), and was said by his ideological opponent Athanasius (*On the Synods*, ch15; cf. Philostorgius, *Ecclesiastical History*, bk2 ch3) to have performed rough songs for rough people in rough places, which sounds very much like an ancestor of London's Roxy Club.

Arius as the progenitor of Rotten and Vicious? A piquant thought. The picture is completed by Arius's fate, one shared by all the drummers of *This is Spinal Tap*, self-combustion, sitting one Saturday in a Constantinople public jakes [**FT133:19**], a destiny Nancy Spungeon would surely have envied.

I have no plans to adapt this column for public performance.


MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE examines the origins of the use of divining rods at the sites of hauntings.

Continuing my look at the use of dowsing in the field of ghost-hunting (see **FT279:20–21**), in the absence of any alternative history, I would suggest the notion of divining for ghosts has arisen as follows, from misunderstandings of a number of writers on paranormal topics.

In the mid-1940s, psychical investigator Harry Price referred to using divining to recover missing church plate at Borley, Essex, site of the "most haunted house in England". This was traditional dowsing, *not* an attempt at contacting spiritual entities. Price's Borley books were hugely influential and many ghost-hunters copied his methods. An early example of pendulum use in investigations was by a team of 'ghost busters' at Shoreham, Sussex, in 1951 (*Reynold's News*, 4 June 1950). Headed by an ex-policeman called Mr Henty, the group were a hard-nosed bunch, carrying a truncheon to deal with practical jokers, and claimed a scientific approach to ghosts. But by the mid-1950s a lot of people were using pendulums and divining rods, ranging from mainstream dowsers in the British Society of Dowsers to an eccentric fringe including the Aetherius UFO cult and devotees of George De La Warr, who promoted health diagnosis through mysterious 'black boxes'.

The bridge between ghosts and divining appears first to have been spanned by archæologist TC Lethbridge (1901–1971) in his *The Ghost and the Divining Rod* (1963). An enthusiastic dowser himself, Lethbridge believed that by using a pendulum, your mind could tune in to stored emotions at historic sites and obtain information. He developed an elaborate theory that different objects and substances each possessed a particular dowsing "rate", meaning they were most easily found with pendulums of specific lengths. Regarding ghosts as merely mental events which "are not in their true position in the sequence of time and they are also in the wrong position in space", Lethbridge considered they were devoid of consciousness, a form of recording.

Today Lethbridge is held in high esteem in popular occult circles, with a website '*Sons of T.C. Lethbridge*' devoted to his ideas; a new biography emerged in May 2011 by Terry Welbourn entitled *T.C. Lethbridge: The Man who Saw the Future*. But at the time, *The Ghost and the Divining Rod* was fiercely criticised. One researcher, Denys Parsons, condemned Lethbridge's dowsing theories as "invalid through ignorance of the background to the subject and of how to design an experiment. The dowser can always score 100 per cent success, even in the presence of hostile observers, whenever he 'knows the answer'." (*Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* v48, p192, Dec 1963) Nonetheless, Lethbridge doggedly went on producing books discussing pendulums and ghosts. In his last book published during his lifetime, a tract attacking Darwinian evolution entitled *The Monkey's Tail* (1969), he wrote: "Here let me make it quite clear a ghost is not a spirit. It is a picture, a sound, or a feeling of horror or pleasure which is not in its correct place in the sequence of events."

ANDREW DAVID

LEFT: TC Lethbridge with dowsing rods at his home 'Mount Blow' near Cambridge in the mid-1930s.

> **Lethbridge thought that by using a pendulum the mind could tune in to stored emotions**

Lethbridge would have been forgotten after his death, but for attracting interest from celebrated writer Colin Wilson. Wilson praised Lethbridge's originality in an introduction to *The Power of the Pendulum* (1976) a posthumous collection of Lethbridge's writings, compiled by his widow Mina. Regrettably, attempts the following year at replicating Lethbridge's pendulum rate research conducted at Sheffield University failed, though no further tests were undertaken. (HC Harper: "An experimental investigation of Lethbridge's pendulum rates", *Journal of the SPR* v49, Sept 1977.)

Nonetheless, Wilson continued to write about Lethbridge's ideas, particularly in his book *Mysteries* (1978), where he linked dowsing with then fashionable ideas about leys supposedly flowing through prehistoric and haunted sites. Never afraid of bold speculation, two years later Wilson postulated connections between poltergeist activity and earth energies in his acclaimed book *Poltergeist!* (1980), also mentioning ley-hunter and ghost-seer Stephen Jenkins, who believed leys led to hauntings, including those at (where else?) Borley Church. *Poltergeist!* was also significant in reviving ideas of some polts as discarnate spirits, then out of fashion with parapsychologists.

Endorsement by Wilson and others led to many new ghost-hunters assuming demonstrable links existed between dowsing and detecting spirits, revealed in the movements of simple pendulums. Lethbridge's cautious separation of spiritual and material realities was readily forgotten, if ever noticed at all, amid the resurgence of popular ghost-hunting in the 1990s, but few could have predicted just how bizarre notions would become.

Take for example claims by Ruth 'The Truth' Urquhart, promoted in the *Daily Star* (31 Oct 2006), describing Mary King's Close, Edinburgh:

"As soon as I step into the darkened cobbled streets, I feel a ghostly presence… I quickly reach for my trusty pendulum and ask it if we are in the presence of a spirit. It starts to swing in a clockwise direction – a definite yes! I think I have encountered this spirit before. It looks to me like Major Thomas Weir. I ask the pendulum, and again it turns in a clockwise direction."

About the only thing one can agree on is Ruth's assertion: "Thomas Weir is not a spirit you would want to meet down a gloomy close around Hallowe'en". Weir was an infamous warlock and sexual deviant, executed for incest and bestiality (things even the *Daily Star* deplores, unless in soap operas). Nonetheless, the *Daily Star* unhesitatingly granted 'Ruth The Truth' a regular column, proclaiming: "Every week Scotland's top soothsayer will use her unique powers to see the twists and turns your life will take… Using her psychic tracking device, Ruth can help you…" Advice on love affairs, career change, lottery predictions and connecting with deceased relatives "to relay messages from beyond the grave" are supposedly available via Ruth and her pendulum.

You are of course free to believe 'Ruth the Truth' and other performers in this field – many may genuinely think that dowsing helps one find and speak to ghosts – but I would suggest that a cool and rational look at dowsing on investigations is long overdue. Before boldly accepting claims that dowsing connects you to the spirits, it may be worth recalling a warning given by GK Chesterton regarding Ouija boards: "I saw quite enough of the thing to be able to testify, with complete certainty, that something happens which is not in the ordinary sense natural, or produced by ordinary conscious will. Whether it is produced by some subconscious or still human force, or by some powers, good, bad or indifferent, which are external to humanity, I would not attempt to decide. The only thing I will say with complete confidence about that mystic and invisible power is that it tells lies." (*Autobiography*, 1936).

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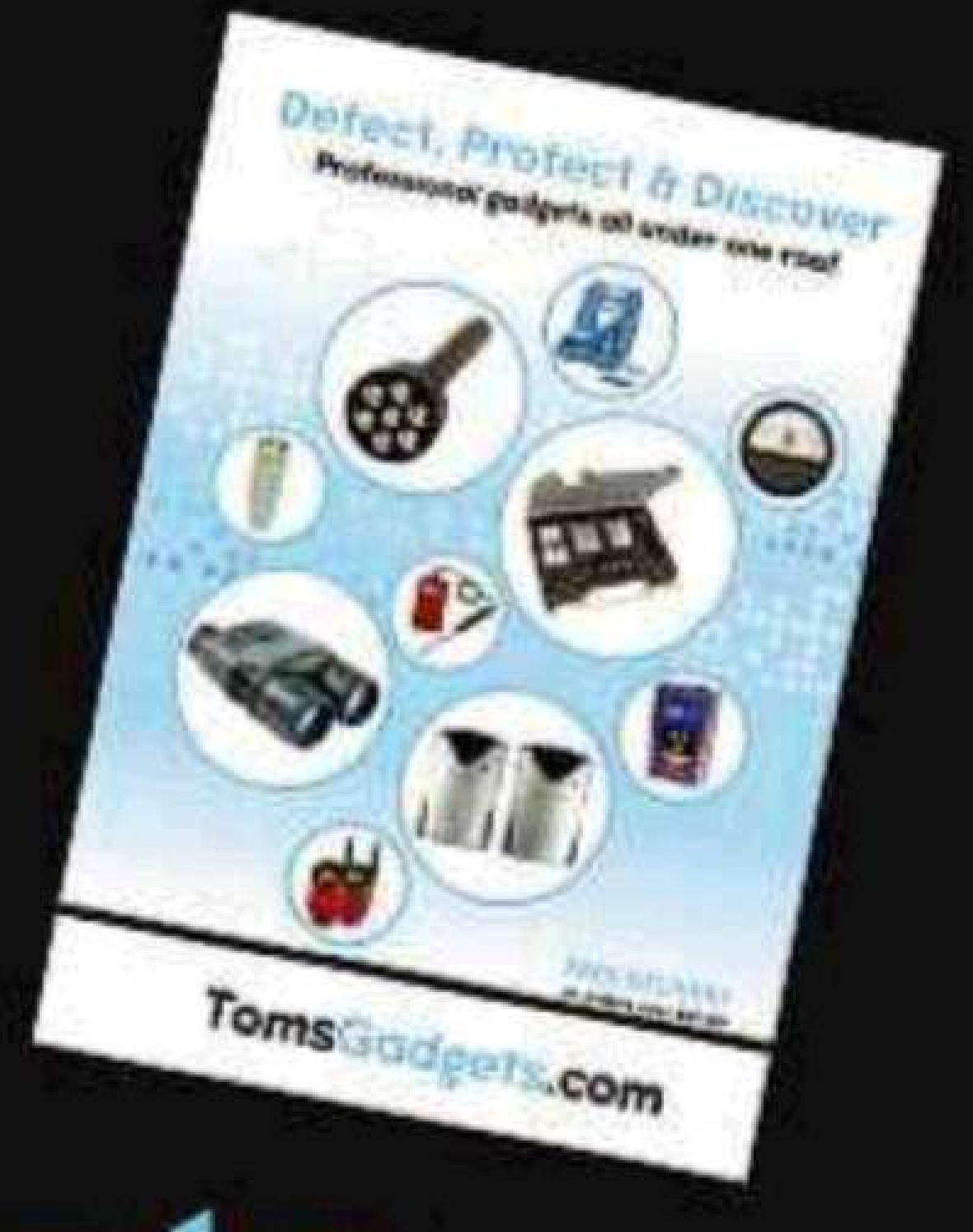

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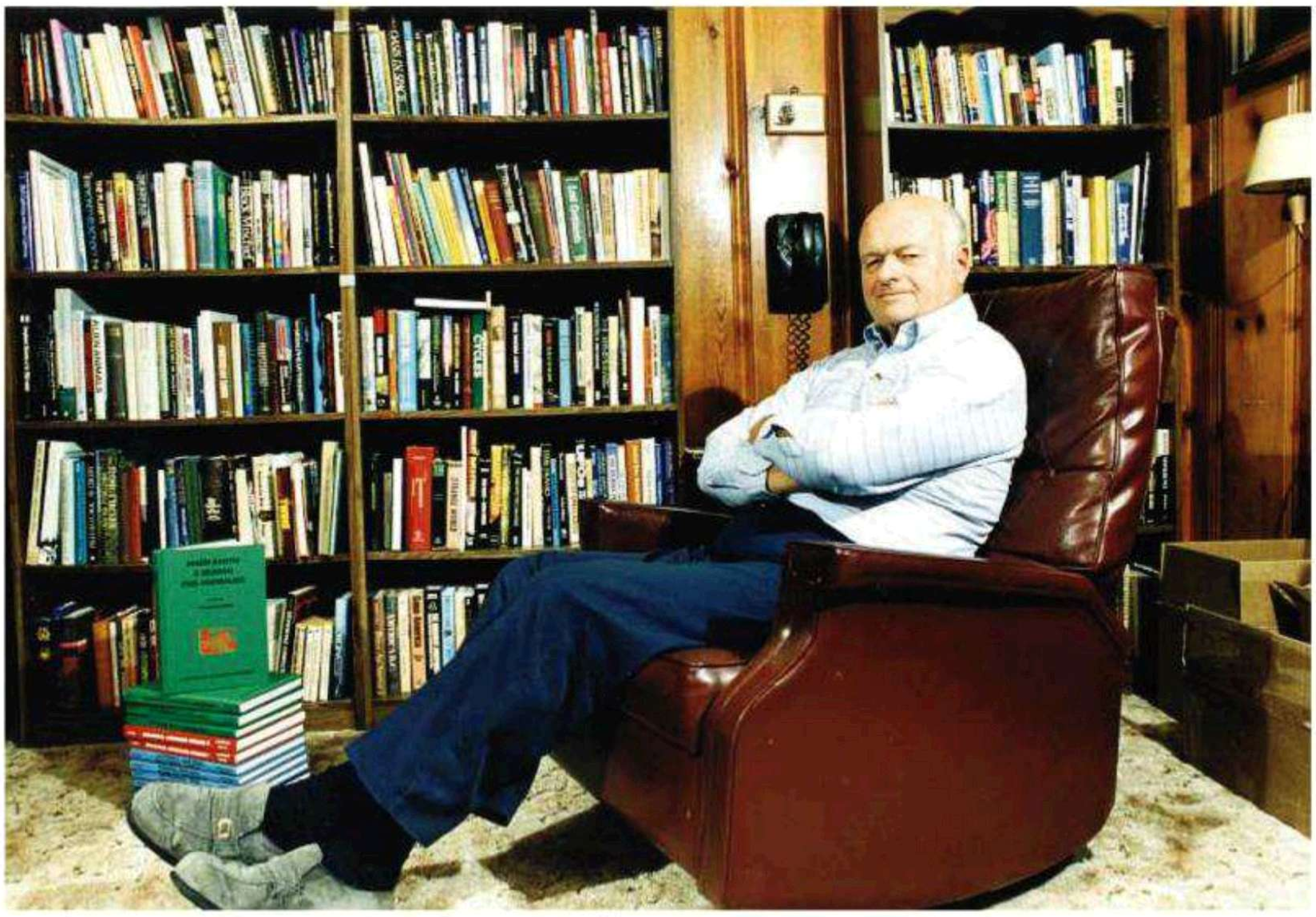
NECROLOG

BOB RICKARD mourns the passing of William Corliss, one of forteana's Great Old Ones.



COURTESY BALTIMORE SUN / KENNETH LAM

WILLIAM CORLISS

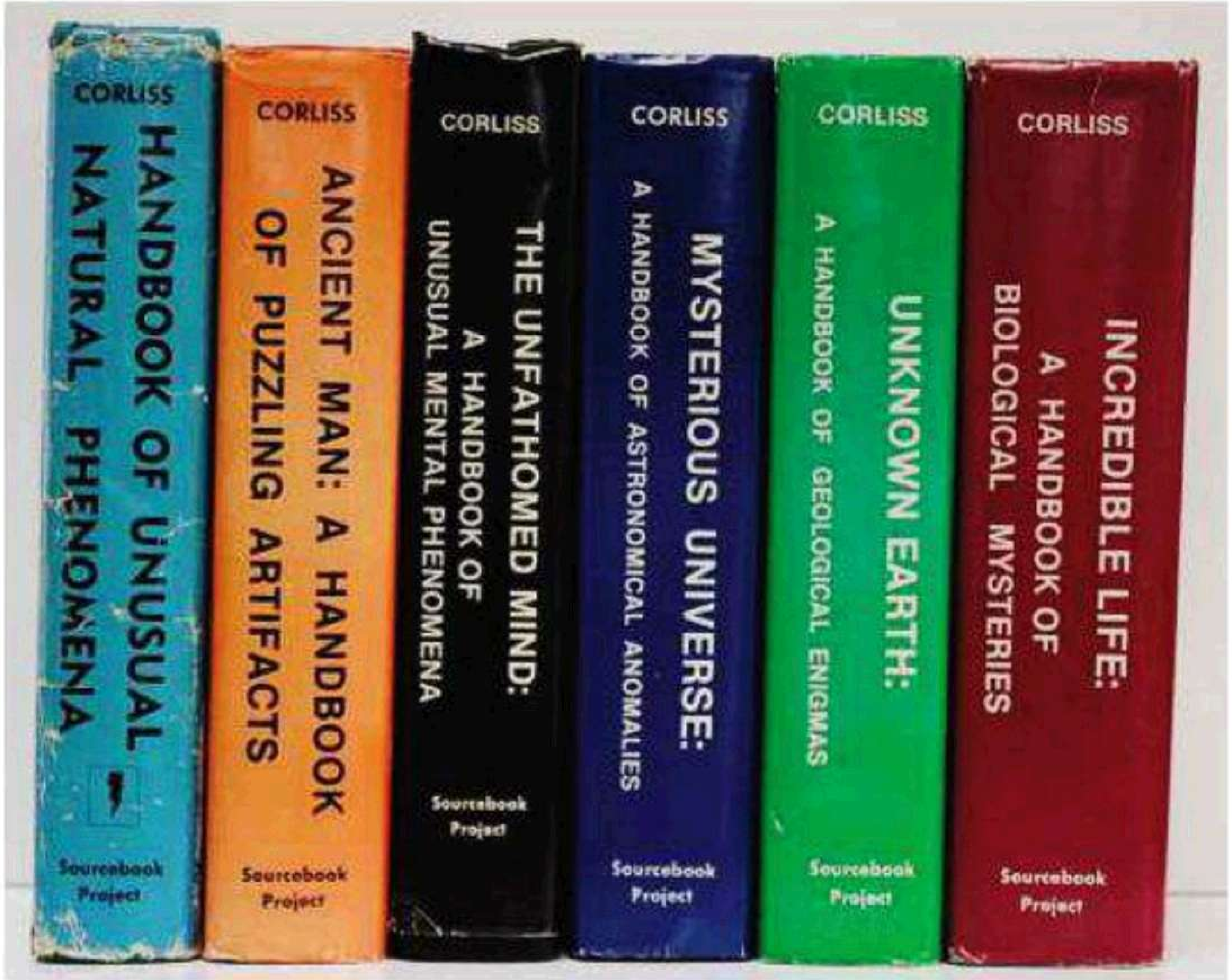
Corliss was an American physicist and writer who, for the last 40 years, collected and published data on scientific anomalies in his 'Sourcebook Project', which he once described as "a massive hoard of scientific enigmas, paradoxes, and esoterica". Most of these anomalies were observed during normal scientific study, research, experimentation and exploration, but he also included some poorly understood but well-observed phenomena from the fields of forteana, parapsychology, cryptozoology and 'fringe sciences'. Consequently, his admirers called him "the world's greatest living anomalist". He wrote around 60 books, including educational titles on atomic energy, astronomy, space propulsion, oceanography, scientific satellites, control systems, wind tunnels, and space travel – some of them for NASA and others for the National Science Foundation.

Bill Corliss was – wrote Arthur C Clarke in his *Astounding Days: A Science Fictional Autobiography* (1990) – "the latter-day, and much more scientific, successor" to Charles Fort. There have been other comparisons between Fort and Corliss, marking differences in style, content and extent (see http://blogs.forteana.org/bob) but – to sketch just how enormous a task was Corliss's *magnum opus*, his *Catalog of Anomalies* – it is worth noting that whereas Fort had collected 40,000 notes over nearly 40 years from journals, papers and books published between 1800 and 1930, Corliss had, in just over 30 years, surpassed that by several tens of thousands, all published in more than 25 of a projected series of 35 volumes. The Cornell University astrophysicist Thomas Gold had no doubt that Corliss's project was "a valuable addition to scientific literature. (*Icarus*, vol.41, 1980).

What made Bill's work unique – Benjamin Radford, psychologist and deputy editor of the science magazine *Skeptical Inquirer*, told *FT* – was that he resisted the urge to editorialise. "He was a scientist, and as a scientist he recognized what many forteans could not: that evidence and proof of strange phenomena is best gathered, not from dubious anecdotes by anonymous sources, but by knowledgeable experts and scientists. He was genuinely curious about anomalies and saw them as part of science, not apart from it."

When, in 2004, I reviewed Bill's second compilation of his *Science Frontiers* newsletter, I wrote: "If there was an award for services to forteana, it would go to Bill Corliss without a doubt. The man's dedication to and perseverance in collecting and publishing data on scientific anomalies are truly heroic." I should have known – and it was typical of Bill's modesty that he didn't correct me – that he had in fact received such an accolade 10 years earlier. In June 1994, the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE) awarded him their Tim Dinsdale Memorial Prize "for significant and long-term contributions to the study of anomalistics". On that occasion, Prof. Marcello Truzzi (a founder of CSICOP and SSE, see **FT36:28**, **208:58–59**) declared Bill "an unsung hero of science" (*Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 1994).

At the end of World War II, Bill left the US Navy as a veteran and pursued physics at university, graduating first at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, New York, in 1950, and then at the University of Colorado, Boulder, in 1953. Through the 1960s, he worked in industry, ending as Director of Advanced Programs in the Nuclear Division of Martins in Maryland. His friend and colleague, Henry Bauer – an emeritus professor of chemistry at Virginia State University who became editor-in-chief of the SSE's *Journal* – wrote: "In 1963, after a decade of industrial experience, Bill became a free-lance writer and researcher, a decision that has been cherished by scientists around the world who know Bill Corliss as the best source of information about scientific anomalies."


CORLISS
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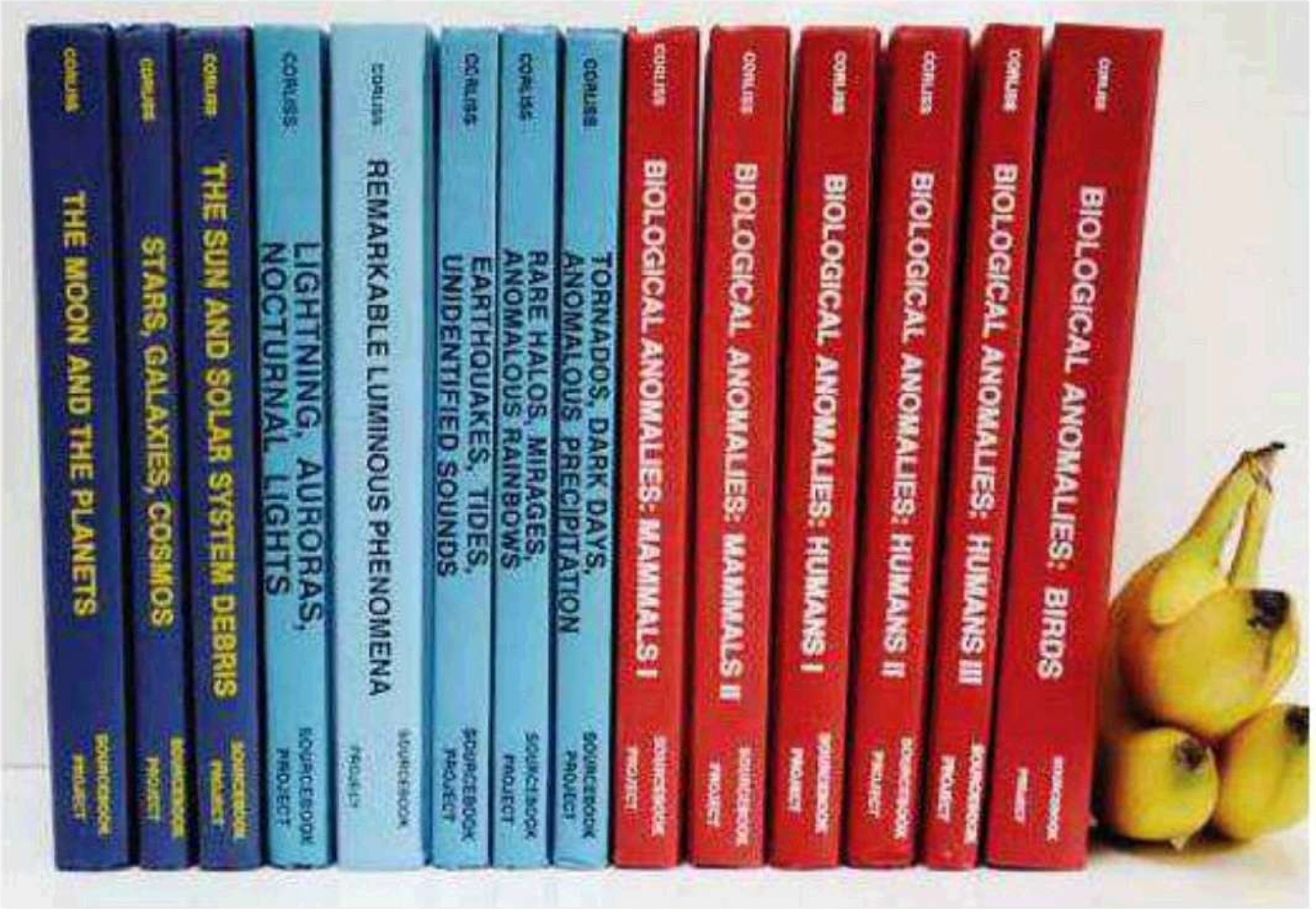
In an early issue of *Fortean Times*, Bill told us that “my own Fortean proclivities did not begin with Charles Fort”, but rather with the Canadian geologist and creationist George McCready Price. One day in 1951, while rummaging among some second-hand books in Berkeley, Bill found Price’s *Evolutionary Geology and the New Catastrophism* (1926). “This was my first encounter with ‘outlaw science’. Price had collected many facts that he claimed undermined conventional geology and supported catastrophic hypotheses, such as the Biblical Deluge… and [which] worked contrary to the geological and biological philosophies set in motion by Lyell and Darwin. Once my mind was adjusted to the heresy of it all, I quickly discovered the ‘Crehore atom’ [atomic origin of gravitation], the ‘Drayson theory’ [Earth’s tilting pole causes catastrophes] and, finally, in 1953, in the University of Colorado library, the works of Charles Fort.” (‘The Evolution of the Fortean Sourcebooks’, **FT7:18–19**, Nov 1974.)

Bill described his “discovery of the Fortean world” as an illumination. “My first contacts with Fort were identical in psychic content to my first heady encounters with Baconian science. It took but a short while for me to realize that honest science and honest Forteanism are one and the same.” He saw what many critics of Fort’s work could not, that neither Fort nor his data were a threat to ‘honest science’. Bill advocated a better attitude, one exemplified by a quotation from William James with which he prefaced most of his books: “Anyone will renovate his science who will steadily look after the irregular phenomena; and when the science is renewed, its new formulas often have more of the voice of the exceptions in them than of what were supposed to be the rules.”

“During the 1960s,” continued Bill, “I began to collect books and papers on the borderlands of science.” What appealed to him was that Fort’s focus on “anomaly research, while not science *per se*, has the potential to destabilize paradigms and accelerate scientific advances.” However, forteans, by themselves, Bill realised, “may stimulate scientific revolutions but cannot carry them through.” As examples, he pointed to Velikovsky, Wilhelm Reich and von Däniken, whose publicising of anomalies in orthodox thinking had “barely perturbed science”. Besides, he added, their advocacy was distinctly anti-science and non-fortean in their authoritarian tone.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BIOLOGICAL ANOMALIES: HUMANS I
BIOLOGICAL ANOMALIES: HUMANS II
BIOLOGICAL ANOMALIES: HUMANS III
BIOLOGICAL ANOMALIES: BIRDS
SOURCEBOOK PROJECT

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He saw what many critics of Fort’s work could not

He determined to do something “different” and, by 1972 he was clear on his mission. Firstly “the scope of the Fortean approach had to be broadened to include all areas of knowledge”; secondly “the scientific community must be brought in, for only they are more likely to come up with more answers than questions”; and finally “the older Fortean data had to be rescued quickly and organized”.

So, deliberately, the tone of the Sourcebooks was set. The encyclopædist and UFO historian Jerome Clark characterised them as “essentially conservative in outlook” compared to the general run of writers about anomalous phenomena. He explains: “Corliss selects his material almost exclusively from scientific journals [..] not newspapers, so it has already been subjected to a filtering process which would have removed most hoaxes and reports from obvious cranks.” (*Unexplained!* 2003). Over the years, the format went through several changes – from ring binders to stand-alone handbooks and paperback collections of his newsletters – culminating in a handsome series of hardbacks, colour-coded for the different branches of science. In 2003, he added *Scientific Anomalies and Other Provocative Phenomena*, a special 296-page volume that detailed his system of 6,000 categories and headings.

He was genuinely pleased and surprised that his first volume, *Strange Phenomena*, published in 1974, was actually recommended by both *Nature* and *Science*. “Mainstream science’s response to my collections has been remarkably favorable despite my obvious iconoclastic tendencies. *Nature* has reviewed five of my books without recommending their immediate incineration,” he added proudly. It also amused him greatly that more than one reviewer had recommended that undergraduates should not be exposed to his books lest the “procession of damned facts” (as Fort put it) tarnish the image of science. “My greatest thrill,” he wrote, was in discovering overlooked reports that lurked in older publications. “These tedious searches were hard on the eyes, but they opened them to a universe not taught by my college professors! The original accounts are intrinsically exciting because the eye-witnesses were often astounded or at least highly intrigued by what they saw.”

Bill never lost his enthusiasm over the years, despite the slog of selling his books by mail order, a business supported by members of his family and colleagues. Ian Tresman – whose award-winning data site devoted to Bill’s publications and newsletters (science-frontiers.com) was one of the first on the Web (q.v. archive.org) – told *FT* that he had been inspired by his discovery of the ‘Sourcebook Project’ books in the late 1970s. “I became a web publisher in the mid-1990s and the Sourcebooks were among the first books that I thought would benefit from promotion on the Internet. By mid-1998, I also put about 50 of his *Science Frontiers* newsletters online with free access and the site now sees 25–30,000 visitors per month. This quiet success,” says Tresman, is “a credit to Corliss’s high standards and unique work.”

Corliss’s guiding philosophy is not dissimilar to Fort’s: “Anomalies reveal nature as it really is: complex, chaotic, possibly even unplumbable.” He studied the great changes that science itself had undergone since the 19th century. “The philosophical foundation stones of the clockwork universe are eroding fast,” he wrote. “The idea that nature is in balance, that geological processes are uniformitarian, that life evolved in small, random steps, and that the Cosmos is deterministic” are changing, and it is “the sheer abundance of anomalies [that] is a driving force behind this change.” I can almost see Fort himself nodding in agreement when Bill told us: “The search itself is everything.”

The loss of such an industrious, dedicated and independent scholar is a blow to us all, but we can console ourselves with his Sourcebook legacy. However, many of Bill’s fans around the world are also hoping his family will keep the existing volumes in print and eventually publish his works-in-progress.

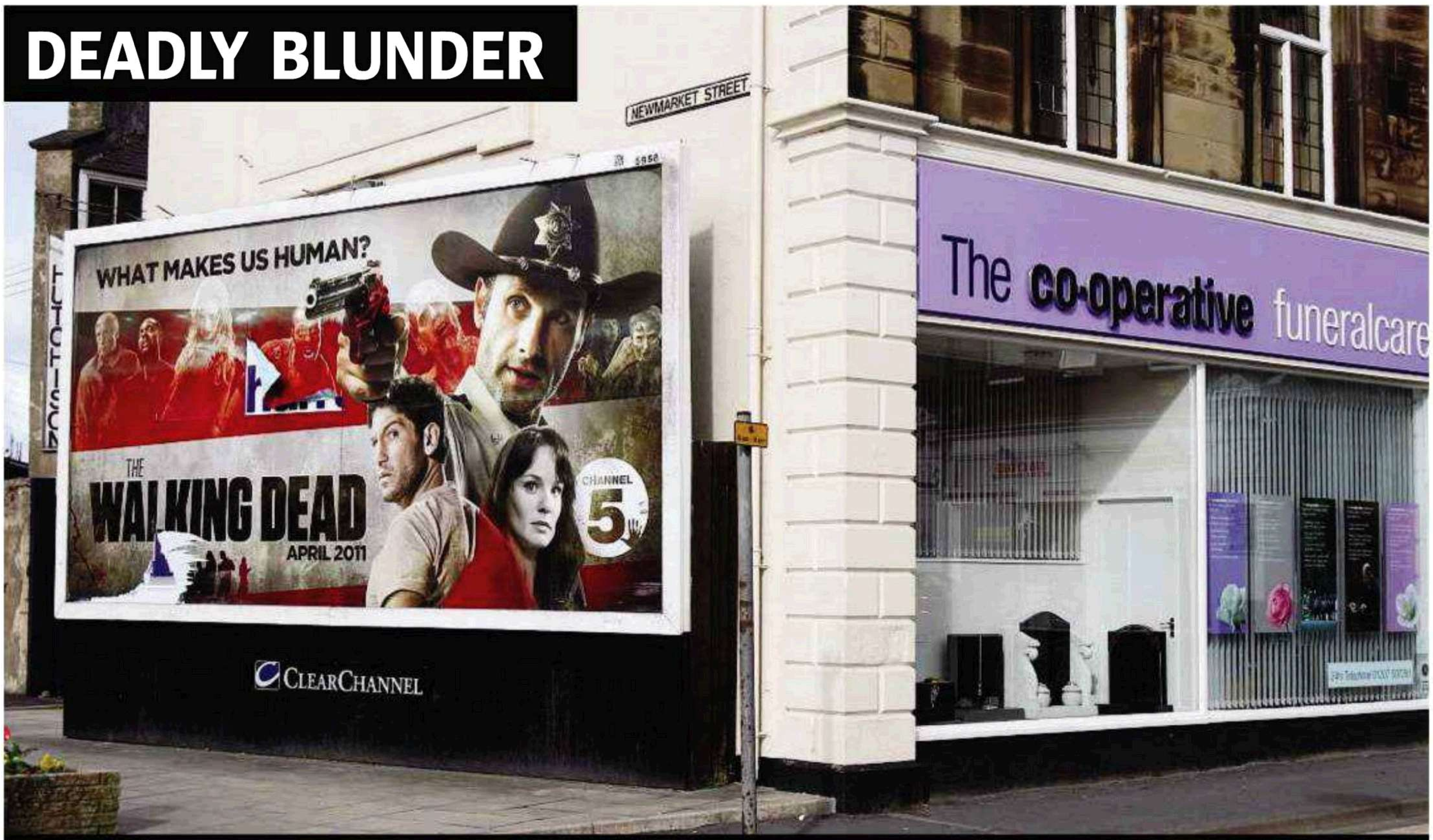
Bill is survived by his wife of 61 years, Virginia, as well as four children, seven grandchildren, and one great-grandson.

William Roger Corliss, physicist and anomalist; born Stanford, Connecticut 28 Aug 1926; died 8 July 2011, aged 84.

RESURRECTIONS

We all have to go some time, but on some occasions observers are a bit too quick to reach for the death certificate.

DEADLY BLUNDER



NORTH NEWS & PICTURES

An advertising company placed a billboard for a television series called *The Walking Dead* on the side of a funeral parlour. The "unfortunate juxtaposition" in Consett, Co. Durham, led to the poster for the Channel 5 post-apocalyptic drama being removed from The Co-operative Funeralcare. *D.Telegraph, Metro, 14 April 2011.*

In September 2008, two-year-old Oluchi Nwaubani spent nearly 20 minutes at the bottom of a swimming pool at a friend's house in Bromley, southeast London, before being discovered. She was airlifted to the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel before being transferred for specialist care to Great Ormond Street children's hospital. Scans showed she had been starved of oxygen for some 18 minutes. The brain usually dies after about six minutes without oxygen and the heart usually stops after 10. Oluchi was not breathing and doctors gave her a two per cent chance of survival – but after three days in intensive care she started to breathe again. Four months later, she was recovering well at home in Petts Wood, southeast London. "She is now on her feet," said her mother, Tayo. "She's walking, she's running, and her speech is very good." ***BBC News, D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 10 Feb 2009.***

Gore Otteson, aged 21 months, was without a heartbeat for 50 minutes after he wandered from his family's holiday cabin in Gunnison, Colorado, and ended up face-down in a ditch on 6 July 2010. It is thought he was under water for 25 minutes before he was found trapped under a log in the fast-flowing irrigation ditch 350ft (106m) from the cabin. His grandfather, a retired surgeon, and a cousin who was a nurse immediately began CPR, which was probably vital in ensuring his survival. Paramedics airlifted him to hospital in Denver, where his heart was restarted. It was feared that he was brain-dead, but a nurse noticed his arm move and doctors decided to try a controversial hypothermic treatment, which involved cooling the boy's body to 32°C (90°F) for 48 hours, minimising brain activity. When his temperature was raised, he woke up and signalled he was hungry. Three weeks later, he was given a clean bill of health.

Cold water causes the body's heart rate to slow, especially in children, creating a kind of hibernation – a phenomenon called "mammalian diving reflex". The valley in Gunnison in the Rocky Mountains is one of the coldest places in the US. Temperatures dip to 2°C (36°F) at night, even in summer. The average temperature of the Gunnison River is between 2°C and 8°C (36–46°F). *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, 11 Sept 2010.* For other examples of hypothermic resurrections, see **FT45:28, 131:8, 146:6.**

Jean McDonald, 64, was taken to Broomfield Hospital in Chelmsford, Essex, on 15 May 2011 following a series of fits, but went into cardiac arrest during the journey. Doctors fought for two hours to save her. She was moved to intensive care and put on a life support machine before being placed in an induced coma. She was thought to be clinically dead and her family was given permission to remove locks of her hair. After her breathing had stopped for more than 30 minutes, doctors assessed the severity of her brain damage as 4½ on a scale of one to five – whereupon she awoke from her induced coma. In the following month, Mrs McDonald, from Braintree, made what was described as a miraculous recovery. By the time of the news report, she was able to talk, eat and walk, and was set to return

home in a matter of weeks. ***D.Telegraph, 23 June 2011.***

A 50-year-old grandfather from Libode in South Africa's Eastern Cape province was found unconscious at home on 23 July 2011 and his family presumed he was dead. Morgue owner Ayanda Maqolo said he sent his driver to collect the body shortly after the family called him. "When he got there, the driver examined the body, checked the pulse, looked for a heartbeat, but there was nothing," he said. At 5pm the next day, 21 hours later, the 'dead' man woke up and screamed to be let out after finding himself zipped up in a body bag inside a mortuary chiller. Two mortuary attendants fled the building, assuming it was a ghost. They called for help before eventually going back inside and finding the poor man was still alive. He was rushed to hospital suffering from hypothermia and dehydration before being discharged the next day. *[SAPA] 24 July; [AP] dailymail.co.uk, 25 July; Independent, 26 July 2011.*

On 1 October 2010, police called to check on Ruth Shillinglaw Johnson, 89, found her motionless on her bathroom floor in Severna Park, Maryland. They didn't check for a pulse because she was blue and not breathing, and one officer detected an odour "similar to a decomposition smell". They told her son, who planned to donate her body to science. A State Anatomy Board employee arriving to take the body three hours later heard Mrs Johnson take a deep breath and saw her move her arm. She was transferred to a hospice, where she finally died two weeks later on 16 October. ***hometownannapolis.com, 16 Oct; Washington Post, 19 Oct 2010.***

Maria das Dores Conceicao, 88, seemed at death's door when she arrived at hospital in Ipatinga in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. On 22 December 2010, doctors signed her death certificate, giving the cause as hypertension and blocked arteries and sent her off to a funeral parlour. The Alzheimer's sufferer was a few hours from being buried alive when funeral staff noticed she was still breathing and was twitching slightly in the coffin. She was rushed back to hospital, but died for real on Christmas Eve, two days later. *D.Mail, 27 Dec; Independent, 28 Dec 2010.*

The last round-up of the "Lazarus phenomenon" was in ***FT262:10–11****.*

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Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

STEPHEN ROONEY'S FATHER WAS KILLED BY a bolt of lightning 48 years ago while he was fishing in Fortescue, New Jersey, when Stephen was five years old. After seeing lightning in the sky during a barbecue in Hammonton, New Jersey, on 10 July, Stephen said to his family and friends: "Don't worry guys, lightning never strikes twice." He then stepped away from the barbecue with his cousin Scott Digeralamo to smoke cigars by a tree, when lightning hit the ground where they were standing. Digeralamo survived the strike, but Rooney died five days later. ***NBC Philadelphia, 13 July 2011.***

THE REMAINS OF A MAN WHO HAD BEEN missing for 27 years have been discovered lodged in the chimney of a bank in Louisiana. Joseph W Schexnider, who was 22, disappeared from the town of Abbeville in January 1984, after missing a court hearing over charges of possessing a stolen vehicle. His mother said at the time that he had been known to leave abruptly – including once to work with a circus – and was this time thought to be on a "rendezvous". However, human remains were discovered with a pair of gloves, a cigarette lighter, a watch and a wallet in a chimney during renovations at Abbeville National Bank in May this year. DNA tests in July confirmed that the remains in the chimney, which was sealed off later in the 1980s, were those of Schexnider. He probably died of dehydration or starvation. He had no bag with him, so the police do not suspect him of trying to rob the bank; so what on earth was he doing in the chimney? *D.Telegraph, 27 July 2011.*

BALLOONIST BOB Bickerdike, 63, slammed into rocks after losing height over the French Alps. He contacted friends in the valley below to say he was OK and was making his way down as darkness fell. He was heading for chalets 500ft (150m) below his crash site but slipped on ice and fell 1,300ft (400m) onto boulders in a ravine. Mountain rescuers found his body hours after the crash near the village of Abondance. ***Sun, 12 Feb 2011.***

SHAUN MCBRIDE, 28, A SCAFFOLDER FROM Co. Donegal in Ireland, drowned in Dampier, Western Australia, when scaffolding collapsed into the water beneath him. About 10 days later, on 17 June, he was buried in Burtonport, Donegal. His grieving mother, Sylvia, drew comfort from learning that a pod of dolphins had kept vigil round his body. This had a special poignancy, she said, as Shaun had a huge attachment to dolphins as a young child. They were all he ever drew, and she still had all his pictures in the family home. Father Joe Walsh, a priest based in Perth, said: "We've learnt that a few hours after the accident when divers went to retrieve his body, they saw a big pod of dolphins swimming around him. There was one dolphin that was using its nose to try to lift the body up to the surface, but it wasn't able to do so because the body was caught up in the scaffolding." *Irish Times, Irish Independent, 18 June 2011.*

A WOMAN DIED FROM A HEART ATTACK CAUSED by the shock of waking up at her own funeral in Kazan, Russia. As mourning relatives filed past her open coffin, Fagilyu Mukhametzyanov, 49, woke up and started screaming as she realised where she was. Her husband Fagili, 51, had been told his wife had died of a heart attack after she had collapsed at home with chest pains. "Her eyes fluttered and we immediately rushed her back to the hospital, but she only lived for another 12 minutes before she died again, this time for good," he said. "She wasn't dead when they said she was and they could have saved her." He planned to sue the hospital. ***dailymail.co.uk, 23 June 2011.***

TERRY COLON

BRITAIN'S X-FILES

18. The MoD's UFO files

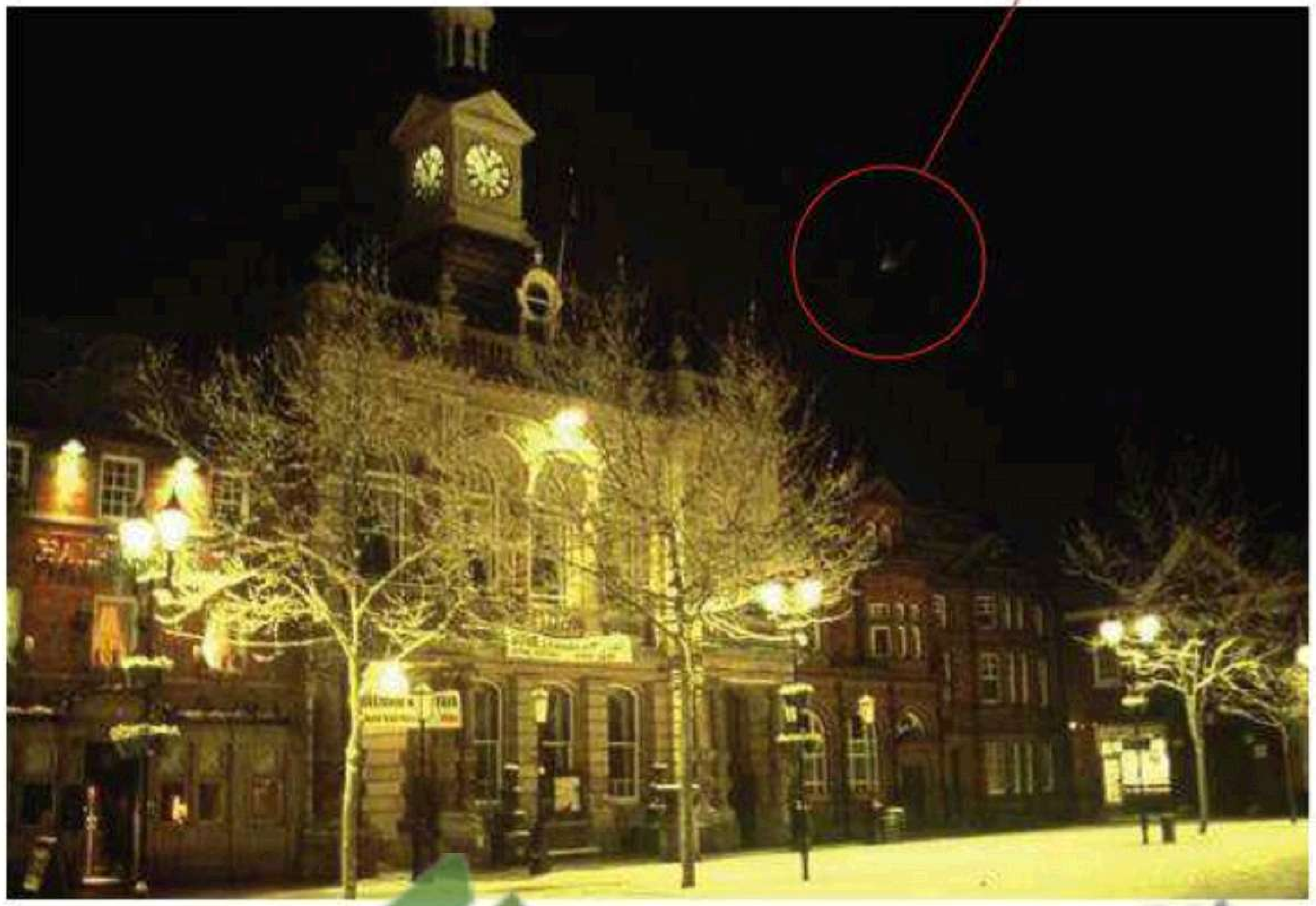
Dr DAVID CLARKE, consultant for the National Archives UFO project, summarises the highlights from the latest cache of Ministry of Defence documents.

The catchphrase made famous by the TV series *The X-Files* was "the truth is out there". And the truth about the British Government's interest in UFOs has now been revealed in the eighth tranche of Ministry of Defence papers released by the National Archives. In what I believe to be the most important revelation so far, an intelligence officer reveals that "lack of funds and higher priorities" had prevented any detailed study of the thousands of reports they had received since the end of World War II.

The frank admission is contained in a formerly secret policy document dated July 1995, written by a desk officer at DI55, the branch of the Defence Intelligence Staff responsible for the study of UFO reports. The officer concludes the lid had already been blown on secrecy surrounding their interest in UFOs by a series of media revelations. But he said the public perception of DI55 as "defenders of the Earth from the alien menace" was "light years from the truth". And he told his opposite number on the MoD's 'UFO desk' that few people would believe the "embarrassing truth… that lack of funds and higher priorities had prevented a proper study of UFO sightings". Another official has scribbled "Ouch!" in the margin of the document.

The DI55 assessment was produced one year before the MoD commissioned another retired officer, who has not been named, to produce a full study based upon a computer database containing details of UFO reports. A copy of the "Condign report" was released to me in 2006 under the Freedom of Information Act (see **FT211:4–6**). It concluded that UAPs ('unidentified aerial phenomena') were natural phenomena posing no threat to the nation. Completion of the report allowed the MoD to draw an end to intelligence interest in UFOs that began half a century earlier with the Flying Saucer Working Party report that used to brief Winston Churchill in 1952 (see **FT164:38–44**). Cuts to defence funding ultimately led to the closure of the MoD's UFO desk, in November 2009. The MoD says it has no further interest in the subject.

These documents form just a small part of some 8,600 pages in 34 formerly secret files opened by the National Archives in August as part of the ongoing disclosure programme that began in 2008. Other highlights include a file that reveals how RAF photography experts were asked to examine a picture that clearly shows a strange "elliptical object" in the sky above Retford in Nottinghamshire in January 2004. The image was captured on slide film by Alex Birch, who 42 years earlier made headlines when he took a black and white photograph showing a fleet of "flying saucers" over Sheffield. On this occasion, he saw nothing in the sky at the time and it was only on examination of the negatives that the mysterious image was noticed. The RAF's image analysts said they could not reach any "definitive conclusions" about the object but suspected it may have been caused by a "droplet of moisture" (see **FT235:28–29**).



BOTTOM: Alex Birch took this photo in Retford, Nottinghamshire, in January 2004, and realised later there was a strange object (enlarged below) seen in the sky above the Town Hall.

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Included in this tranche of papers is a file containing my own correspondence with UFO desk officer Janet Turner that led to the release of the files on the Rendlesham UFO and the report by the Flying Saucer Working Party in 2001. I took this opportunity to request a search for any surviving MoD papers on the famous 1956 "radar-visual" UFO incident at RAF Lakenheath that first came to light when USAF Project Blue Book files were released in 1969 (see **FT213:28–32**). I sent Turner a copy of a first-hand account of this incident by retired fighter controller Freddie Wimbledon that was published by the RAF Radar Museum Newsletter in 1999. In the account, Wimbledon describes how the RAF scrambled Venom aircraft to intercept an object spotted on radar over the nuclear-armed USAF base where the U-2 spyplane had a temporary base. As he directed one aircraft towards the UFO, he heard the pilot call out, "Lost contact, more help," and watched in amazement as the UFO appeared behind the fighter plane "following its every move" before it sped off at terrific speed.

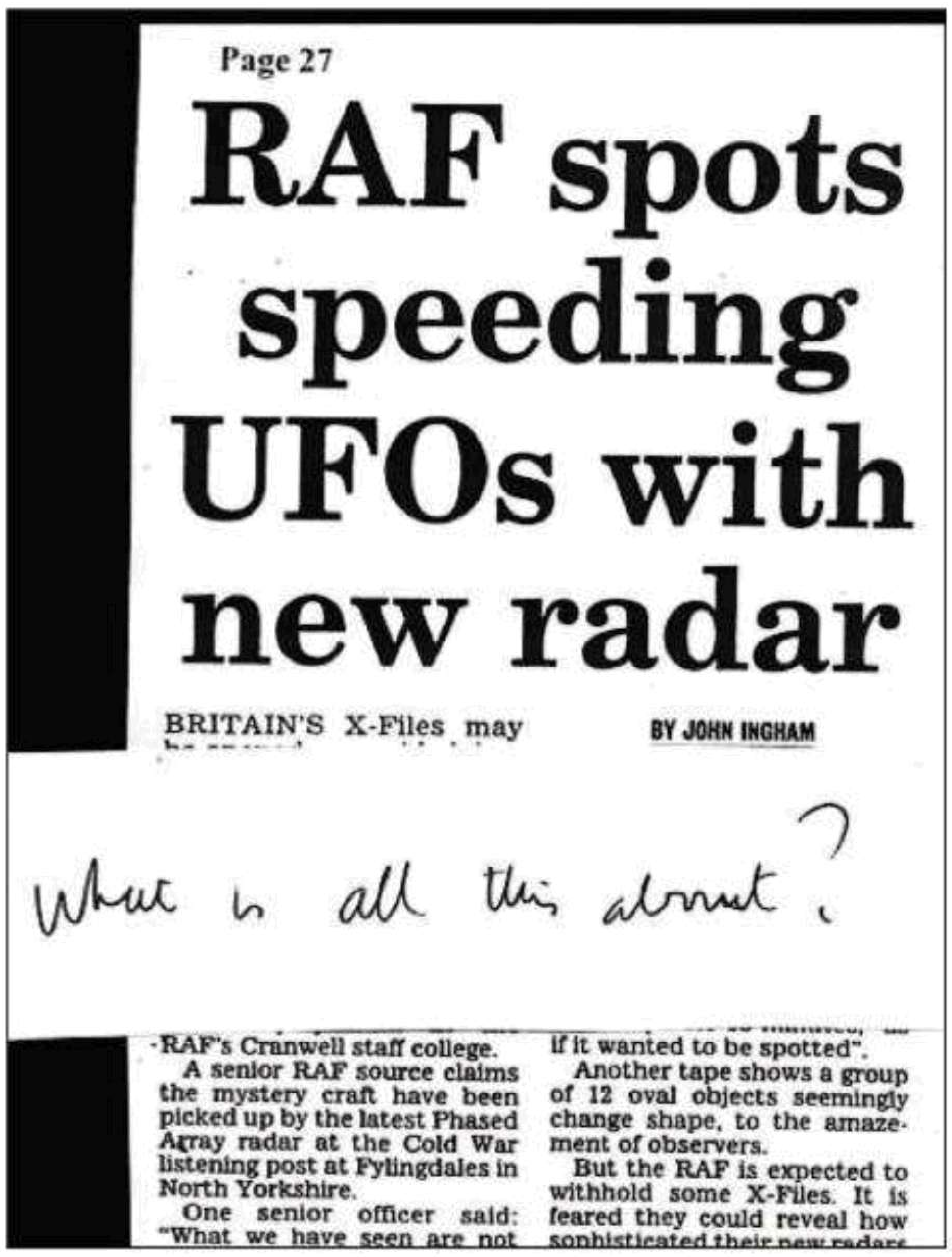
Wimbledon claimed all those involved in the incident were quizzed by a senior officer from Fighter Command who stressed "absolute secrecy". However ,Turner was unable to comment on Wimbledon's story as the Ministry's position on Lakenheath since 1969 has been that Air Ministry records of the incident had been destroyed, along with most other UFO papers from that early period. The loss of the Lakenheath papers was confirmed by the head of the MoD's UFO desk (at that time known as S4 Air), retired Air Commodore Tony Davis, during a TV studio debate on BBC 2's *Man Alive* programme in 1972. What Davis did not reveal to the studio audience was that he was the pilot of one of the intercepting aircraft. By an amazing turn of events, he was airborne at the time in a Venom night-fighter that was diverted to intercept the UFO. In MoD papers, he describes being vectored towards the UFO by ground radar; however, his navigator could not get a "lock on" and they ended up pursuing a bright star.

At the time, Davis was the Commanding Officer of 23 Squadron, and his aircrew were on 24-hour readiness duty during the Suez crisis when the UFO scare began. The squadron's diary says the "mysterious object" seen by USAF radars was eventually put down to a meteorological balloon. After the TV debate, Davis was put on the spot by a ufologist who wanted to know why the file on this occurrence was destroyed. Davis responded: "… if there had been any evidence to indicate the existence of an unidentified but real flying object (and not just an anomalous radar echo), the papers would of course have been retained and investigated in great depth."

This response suggests the "anomalous echo" remained unidentified but Air Ministry was satisfied it was not a Soviet intruder aircraft so there was no further defence interest and no reason for the paperwork to be retained. When considering the possible explanations, it is worth noting that the new files contain details of a more recent incident involving RAF Lakenheath that occurred in January 2007. In this case, an unusual object was detected by the pilot of a USAF F-15 on his airborne radar during a routine exercise. The conversation between the crew and London military air traffic control that ensued was overheard by aircraft enthusiasts on the ground and the story reached ufologists who believed this was a case of aircraft scrambled to investigate a UFO on radar.

The facts, revealed by the MoD file, are far less sensational. When the captain of the F-15 took a closer look, he found the "UFO" was actually the size of a soccer ball and was drifting in the wind at between 17–18,000ft (5,180–5,500m). Was this was a tiny spaceship full of miniature aliens? Or was it a weather balloon? Unsurprisingly, the F-15 pilot felt a balloon was the more likely option.

Balloons were also responsible for a type of UFO sighting that spread like a virus across the British Isles from the summer 2006. These are the ubiquitous orange lights in the sky that drift slowly across the night sky in formations that resemble fleets of flying saucers (see **FT239:30**; **255:29**; **256:33**). Chinese lanterns, or mini hot-air balloons, released at wedding parties and music festivals, are the obvious culprits but tabloid hype transformed them into alien craft. One account from Herne Bay, Kent, filed in August 2006 describes eight yellow/orange spheres "that looked like they had flames coming out of the back of them". Another from London describes hundreds of fireballs that were an "amazing" sight in the night sky. Chinese lanterns almost certainly explain a report of revolving lights spotted moving above the Pyramid Stage at the Glastonbury festival during the headline set by Radiohead in June 2003.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RAF spots speeding UFOs with new radar

BRITAIN'S X-Files may

BY JOHN INGHAM

What is all this about?

-RAF's Cranwell staff college.

A senior RAF source claims the mystery craft have been picked up by the latest Phased Array radar at the Cold War listening post at Fylingdales in North Yorkshire.

One senior officer said: "What we have seen are not

if it wanted to be spotted".

Another tape shows a group of 12 oval objects seemingly change shape, to the amazement of observers.

But the RAF is expected to withhold some X-Files. It is feared they could reveal how sophisticated their new radars

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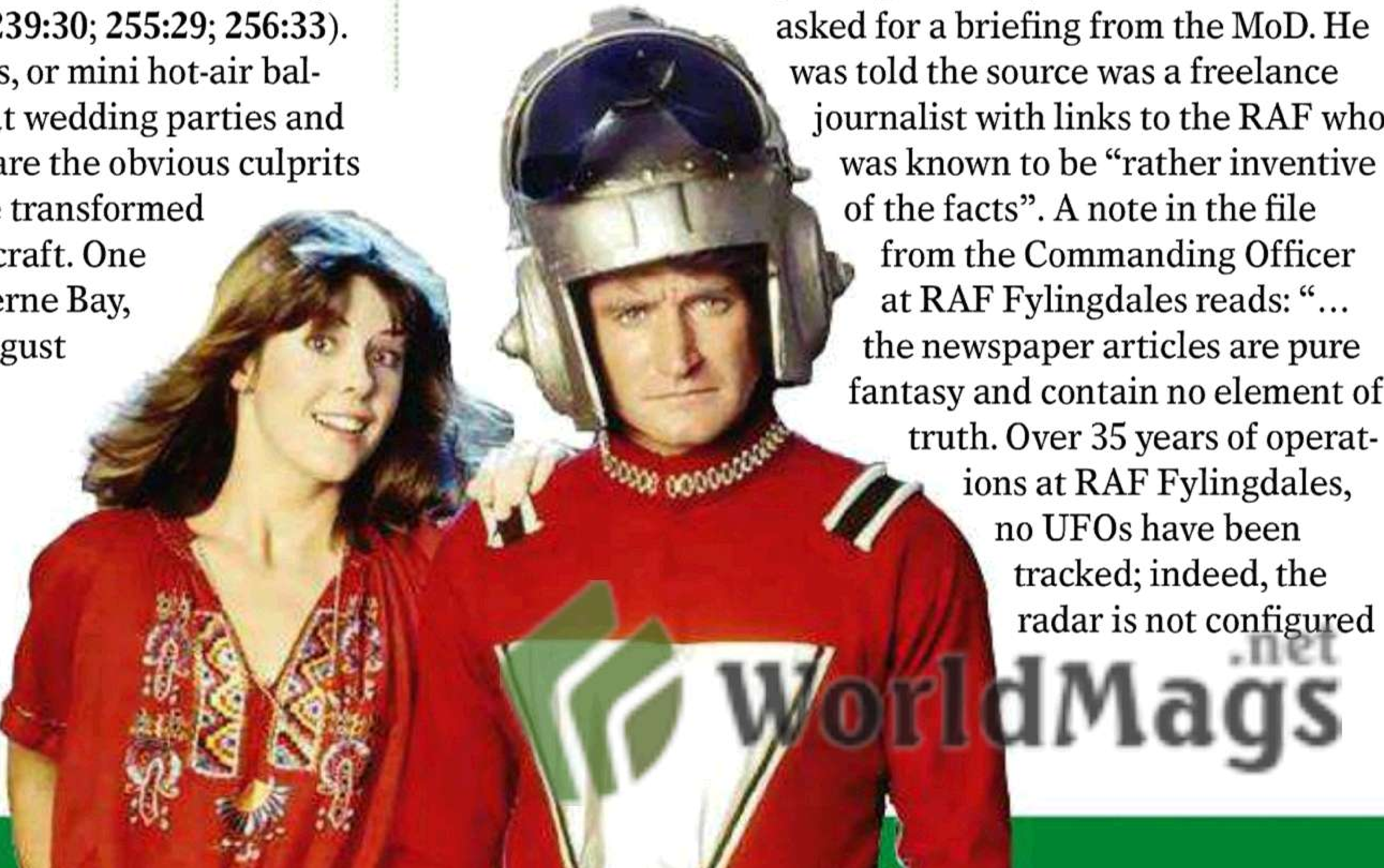
ABOVE: A *Daily Express* story in April 1998 claimed that a UFO as big as a battleship had been seen over the North Sea by the early warning radar station at Fylingdales, Yorkshire. Defence Minister John Spellar demanded an explanation and was told the story was fabricated by a freelance journalist.

BELOW: Pam Dawber and Robin Williams starred in American sitcom *Mork and Mindy*.

Other UFO stories are revealed as having no basis in reality whatsoever. For instance, on 27 April 1998 two national newspapers, the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* claimed that radar scanners at the early warning station at RAF Fylingdales in North Yorkshire had tracked a UFO "as big as a battleship" moving at the improbable speed of 17–24,000 mph (27,000–39,000 km/h) over the North Sea. The story claimed Dutch F-16 fighters had been scrambled and radar tapes of the incident would be presented at a conference hosted by RAF Cranwell, the RAF's officer training college in Lincolnshire. An anonymous "source" told the paper "…it was definitely under control, judging by the various manœuvres executed."

Who was this "source"? Labour's Under Secretary of State for MoD, John Spellar MP, saw the articles and asked for a briefing from the MoD. He was told the source was a freelance journalist with links to the RAF who was known to be "rather inventive of the facts". A note in the file from the Commanding Officer at RAF Fylingdales reads: "… the newspaper articles are pure fantasy and contain no element of truth. Over 35 years of operations at RAF Fylingdales, no UFOs have been tracked; indeed, the radar is not configured to track any such objects, particularly in the reported areas… interestingly, as is always the case with these reports, the military source remains unnamed, lending weight to the fact that the reports are a fabrication."



Easily the most bizarre story that emerged from these files began with a standard sighting of lights in the sky over south London and ended in truly surreal circumstances. On 10 January 2003, the MoD's UFO desk received a call from a woman who claimed she and her mother had sighted, in the early hours, "lights, forming a worm-shaped wriggling around in the sky" from their home in East Dulwich. Fearing this could be an attack by terrorists, she called Peckham police who tried to reassure her the lights were probably from a laser show. But after the control room received further calls from the women, they sent a car with two officers to their address.

According to the account transcribed by the MoD, when the police car arrived it contained "two policemen and two men in 'space suits, with dark glasses, who called themselves Mork and Mindy' (characters from a 1980s sitcom, in which an alien called Mork, played by actor Robin Williams, is stranded on Earth). These men told her not to look at the object because of possible radiation and they carried a transmitter which kept clicking." As the woman's eyes were hurting from watching the lights, they offered to wash them out with a solution, but she declined. She was then told "not to talk to anyone about this and certainly not the press in case it caused panic". After asking the two women for their birth signs, the car left.

The police gave the MoD a very different version. They said the woman was worried the lights could be aliens, not terrorists, and sent a car to her address because she appeared distressed. Officers "could not see anything in the sky and concluded it was possibly a reflection of a star and a street light in her window". It added: "They were two ordinary police, they did not have any 'men in space suits' with them and do not carry any kind of radiation monitoring equipment." The file concludes with a letter of complaint from the older woman who says: "…we have since learned that *Mork and Mindy* was a TV programme about aliens, your men have fed us with a lot of rubbish, presumably to make us look foolish and our story unbelievable, which they have succeeded in doing." **FT**

All 34 files can be downloaded from the TNA website at: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufos.

Author biography

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the UFO files

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UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES FOLLOWS UP NEWS STORIES ABOUT UNUSUAL SEA WAVES AND FINDS A POSSIBLE LINK WITH SOME UFO CASES.

Last issue's report about the English 'tsunami' on 27 June 2011 (**FT279:24–25**) contained a side story referring to how close observers in southern Cornwall felt sudden pressure changes and their hair stand on end as the waves arrived. Both are key elements of many UFO close encounters, so it seemed worth looking for a possible connection.

Although initially it was assumed that the 'tidal surge' (captured on video from the Yealm Estuary near Plymouth) resulted from a landslip under the Atlantic, that theory was quickly refuted by the BGS (British Geological Survey). Key reasons included that no relevant earthquake activity had occurred that could have triggered such a wave and that the height of the surges decreased over the effected coastline in such a manner that the source had to be eastward in the English Channel, not out in the Atlantic.

Another factor that emerged in the days after media interest waned was that this had not been a localised event. The BGS had initially seen this as another argument against a quake-induced Atlantic tsunami, as that wave should have spread outwards in all directions effecting coastlines in Ireland and France. In fact, once readings were gathered in there were similar tidal surges monitored on coastlines from Calais in northern France to St Jean de Luz in the Bay of Biscay well to the south.

However, far from supporting the standard tsunami model, these events showed that no single wave had struck, as they spanned many hours – from 07.00am on the Brittany coast to as late as 2.00pm near Calais. Directions of the surges also implied a moving source heading from west to east through the channel and triggering multiple mini-tsunamis throughout that Monday.

As a consequence, the evidence best matches something termed a 'meteotsunami' – the result of pressure changes on the ocean surface from a passing weather front. Such wave surges can form in certain conditions. In fact, a dramatic meteotsunami struck Daytona Beach in Florida around 11.00pm on 3 July 1992, where waves up to 10ft (3m) high arrived on a calm, warm night and wrecked cars parked on the sands. Luckily, there were few injuries. Had it struck hours later (on Independence Day) the outcome could have been deadly.

My further research then revealed that on 20 July 1929 two people were drowned in Folkestone and Hastings when what is now suspected as a meteotsunami passed along the English Channel, very much like the one in June 2011.

ABOVE: Examples of "Rissaga" waves at Ciutadella harbour on the Balearic island of Menorca on 15 June 2006.

MONTSERRAT, VILIBIC & RABINOVICH, 2006

This earlier system struck holidaymakers on the beaches of Sussex and Kent who reported that warm, calm conditions changed in an instant to produce waves up to 20ft (6m), swamping the shoreline with destructive effect.

Interestingly, these three cases hint at a pattern – the warm, summer months of June/ July when a sudden frontal system sweeps through. Indeed, there was thunderstorm activity after both episodes and storms also struck southern England on the afternoon of 27 June 2011, severely disrupting the Wimbledon tennis tournament.

So, this might suggest that the tsunami in southwest England fits a predictable – if rare – atmospheric event when warm, stable air is disrupted as a frontal system sweeps through rapidly changing localised water surface pressure. But some meteotsunamis have occurred outside hot weather months and the key appears instead to be what the American Meteorology Bulletin assessment of the Daytona Beach event calls "a shallow water gravity wave forced by a propagating squall line".

INLAND TSUNAMIS

This relatively new science and its tantalising hints of a UFO correlation in the shape of the odd side-effects of the recent British case suggests that an uncommon atmospheric process might resolve some puzzling UFO sightings.

Coincidentally, my last two columns [**FT278:29; 279:29**] have looked at nautical UFO encounters, and obvious parallels emerge. Several of those cases involved unusual weather conditions: a sudden calm, stillness and then electrical effects on the environment during the presence of a localised mist – just as in the 2011 meteotsunami.

More remarkable is the case of the *SS Mohican*, covered way back in 1987 (**FT48:59–61**) by Michael Shoemaker. It is worth reflecting on that incident, which dates from July 1904 off the Delaware Breakwater on the US Eastern Seaboard, as it makes a lot of sense in light of this modern meteorological thinking.

Briefly, the day was warm and the sea calm when the *Mohican* was engulfed by a strange grey mist generating static electricity. Compass needles spun wildly, the ship glowed with charge so that the crew's hair stood "straight on end" and beards stuck out "like bristles on a pig". Moreover, an unusual "calmness" and "silence" descended around the ship during the experience. When researching the incident, Shoemaker found local reports of strange weather onshore at the time, including several floating balls of light that would today be reported as UFOs but were most probably ball lightning.

So does this century-old encounter (plus similar, more recent ones reported in this column) result from the same weather phenomenon that appears to lie behind the Devon and Cornwall meteotsunami?

An intriguing question is whether similar effects might occur inland as well as out to sea, with recognisably similar consequences – mistakenly assumed to be UFOs. There are plenty of reasons to think this might be the case.

NOVEMBER 1953: LAKE GJERSJOEN, NORWAY

A man driving home found his car surrounded by a green mist. His body started to tingle like pins and needles all over his arms and head – as if he had been swamped by an electrostatic field. After the incident, his watch was so magnetised it had stopped working and all the rust on the surface of the car had been removed, leaving a shiny cast behind.

24 FEBRUARY 1975: SIZEWELL, SUFFOLK

While walking his dog on the beach, a postman saw a green/yellow mass float onto the sand. As it approached, his skin began to tingle and feel warm, as if exposed to a sunlamp. The air was powerfully ionised and smelt like 'acid drops' (hardboiled sweets). This floating mass returned out to sea as his dog fled in blind panic (it was later found cowering a mile / 1.6km away). Locals reported static interference on their TV sets at this time. I have since spoken with fishermen and a lighthouse keeper about similar floating masses under the water or emerging from it.

26 SEPTEMBER 1977: MINEHEAD, SOMERSET

A computer scientist was driving past a field when she saw something floating above. Getting out, she entered the field through a gate and saw that the cows were huddled together, away from the misty shape, in apparent distress. As she approached she "entered a region where my skin prickled and my hair stood on end" and at this proximity could hear that the floating mass was emitting a buzzing or humming sound. She backed off and noticed that she could enter and exit the electrostatic field in just a stride or two. The witness described the sensation as similar to being close to a Van de Graaf generator during a school experiment.

An interesting link is that these cases were all by either the sea or a lake; and the Sizewell event matches one of the most famous examples in modern UFO history, which occurred on 26 December 1980 just south and inland on the same coast.

"The nearer I got to that thing, the more uneasy I felt"

To me, the most intriguing element of the infamous Rendlesham Forest incident is the close encounter within the forest when US airmen John Burroughs and Jim Penniston claimed to see a rotating mass close to the ground. It had frightening physiological effects.

As John Burroughs said: "The nearer we got to that thing, the more uneasy I felt. This was more than just apprehension. It felt almost like static electricity in the air and was terribly uncomfortable. I had never felt a sensation quite like that before… it was as if I were moving in slow motion. I felt really hot and as if my hair were standing up."

I was impressed by how John struggled to find words that did not sound absurd when he first told me what had happened. I had an interesting talk with him about the idea of it being a UAP (unidentified atmospheric phenomenon) rather than some exotic alien craft as the widespread UFO assumption already had it. He was happily open to the possibility, and it struck a particular chord because I had just received an account from another witness that John cannot have known about.

This man was out on a warm summer's night with his girlfriend near the Kent coast in summer 1966. Suddenly, as a misty shape floated towards them over a river, he noted how: "Everything appeared abnormally quiet, even for night time. My ears felt as if they had been closed… then [there was] a numb feeling… It was a feeling of heaviness and I had a feeling of moving my head in slow motion… [as I spoke to my girlfriend] it was like a record being played at a slower speed."

I have investigated many cases where witnesses talk of this same 'downforce' pushing them into the ground and triggering serious physiological effects (for instance, the well-known Nelson car stop of March 1977 and the Shelley 'abduction' from Bolton in January 1978). In both those cases, passing weather frontal systems were prevalent when the UFO formed – exactly as they were on 27 June 2011 during the recent meteotsunami.

METEOUFOLOGY

With so many cases where witnesses have tried to describe unusual physical sensations experienced while seeing what is tacitly assumed to be a UFO, I tend to suspect that an atmospheric event of some kind might unify these disparate stories.

Very common elements in these accounts are of a sudden sense of calmness, silence and unnatural stillness and evidence of an electrostatic field, with hair standing on end, tingling sensations, warmness (and later a rash-like sunburn, even in winter). Others include the slowing down of time, distortion of sounds, as if atmospheric pressure is changing, and even sensations of floating or reduced gravity. And then there are the magnetic anomalies: spinning compasses, car ignitions failing or paintwork changing inexplicably on cars – or a fishing boat (**FT279:29**) – suggesting that rust might be lifted off the surface by a magnetic field.

Many other clues are coming together via this theory – most notably that a frontal system was sweeping through the area in some of these cases.

Another indicator is that, in some cases, prevailing winds from lee slopes of hills have been reported as being channelled into the location of the sighting, possibly triggering the event. Indeed, in 1989 meteorologist Terence Meaden suggested this same factor behind the formation of crop circles – which, it is worth recalling, tend to appear during warm summer months such as June or July, as do meteotsunamis.

Even the misty form of the UFO clinging close to the ground seems important, perhaps suggesting that this too is part of the weather effect rather than the constructed, floating object that a UFO is too often presumed to be.

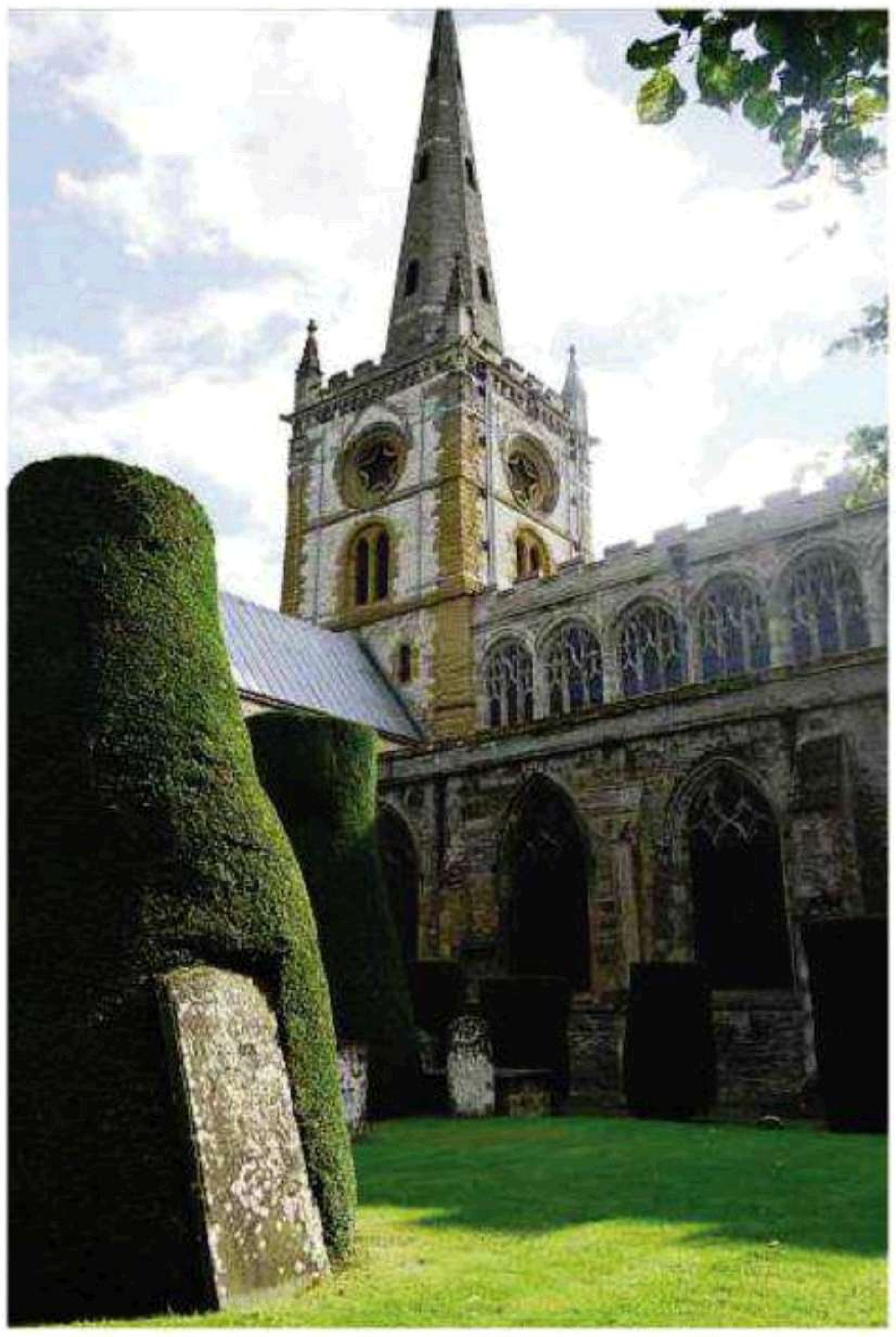
I am beginning to suspect that the meteotsunami over south-west England in June 2011 – and its seemingly trivial side story about pressure changes, sudden weather switches and electrostatic field effects – is pointing us in a very important direction. We may face a much wider phenomenon in which frontal systems under certain conditions can not just trigger unusual surge waves on the ocean (or rivers or lakes) but UFO encounters that are interpreted in the guise of our modern space mythology.

If so, then perhaps such close encounters are *meteoufos*, and – just like the meteotsunamis – are atmospheric phenomena that depend on a combination of natural forces. Perhaps they just happen to resemble extraordinary things that a modern witness might understandably interpret as supernatural or extraterrestrial events but may be, essentially, just weather anomalies.

Bard Wars

Did William Shakespeare really write the works ascribed to him? If so, why does each year bring new claimants and fresh doubts over his authorship? As a new film brings the issue to the big screen, **JERRY GLOVER** surveys recent developments in the controversy over the true identity of the world's most famous writer... about whom so little is known.

Scratch the surface of the life of William Shakespeare, an actor in supporting roles who became the world's most revered writer long after his death, and you will soon find a peculiarly fortean conflict. Known as the Shakespeare Authorship Question (SAQ), the origins of this 200-year-old battle lie in the great void between the little we know about Shakespeare and the swirl of ambiguities and coincidences which, the iconoclastic commanders in this war maintain, give their claimants the right to his mantle. Fought between the covers of books and now online, employing an extensive armoury of documents, curious images, and scraps of folklore, each week brings a further escalation in hostilities as fresh recruits join the ranks of Anti-Stratfordians, an army divided into a multitude of factions rallying behind suspects of wildly varying circumstantial plausibility.



JERRY GLOVER

LEFT: The church of Holy Trinity, Stratford, where the world's most famous writer was christened and supposedly entombed.

John Michell, in his classic study of the SAQ, *Who Wrote Shakespeare*, lamented how serious study of the alternative claimants to Shakespeare's works was being suppressed by orthodox Stratfordians maintaining there was no question to answer.[1] Yet only a decade or so later, Brunel University offers a Masters degree in Shakespeare Authorship Studies; a clear indication of how far the ground has shifted away from the Stratfordians and their central bastion, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. The Trust's chairman, Stanley Wells, is pretty hostile to the course, and its architect, Dr William Leahy, started out as a confirmed Stratfordian: "[I] was fairly dismissive, quite sarcastic, the usual kind of thing from Shakespearean academics when talking about the authorship question." But further research brought him to recognise the SAQ's existence, and the manifold ambiguities, coincidences and controversies lurking under its surface.

Serious study of alternative claimants was suppressed by the orthodoxy

After spending months indoctrinating myself with Anti-Stratfordian theories, a pilgrimage to Stratford-upon-Avon was due. I felt like an infidel infiltrating Mecca. The church of Holy Trinity, where 'Gulielmus Shakspere' was christened in 1564 and whose body traditionally rests in the chancel under an unnamed, doggerel-inscribed slab next to members of his family, is a central battleground in the SAQ. Apart from the portrait in the First Folio (see below), the only other possibly authentic likeness of Shakespeare is his effigy, which overlooks his tomb. But there are discrepancies between the present restored monument and the first drawing of it made by William Dugdale in 1653. The issue turns on a woolsack, and the resemblance, or lack thereof, between Dugdale's Shakespeare – a gaunt and dour man with one, maybe two, empty hands – and the present portly "self satisfied pork butcher" with the "subtle expression of a bladder" (as Mark Twain put it) holding a quill pen and paper. Even allowing for Dugdale as

Principum amicitias!

ABOVE: Stanley Wells of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust admires the 'Cobbes Portrait' he believes to be a contemporary image of Wlliam Shakespeare.

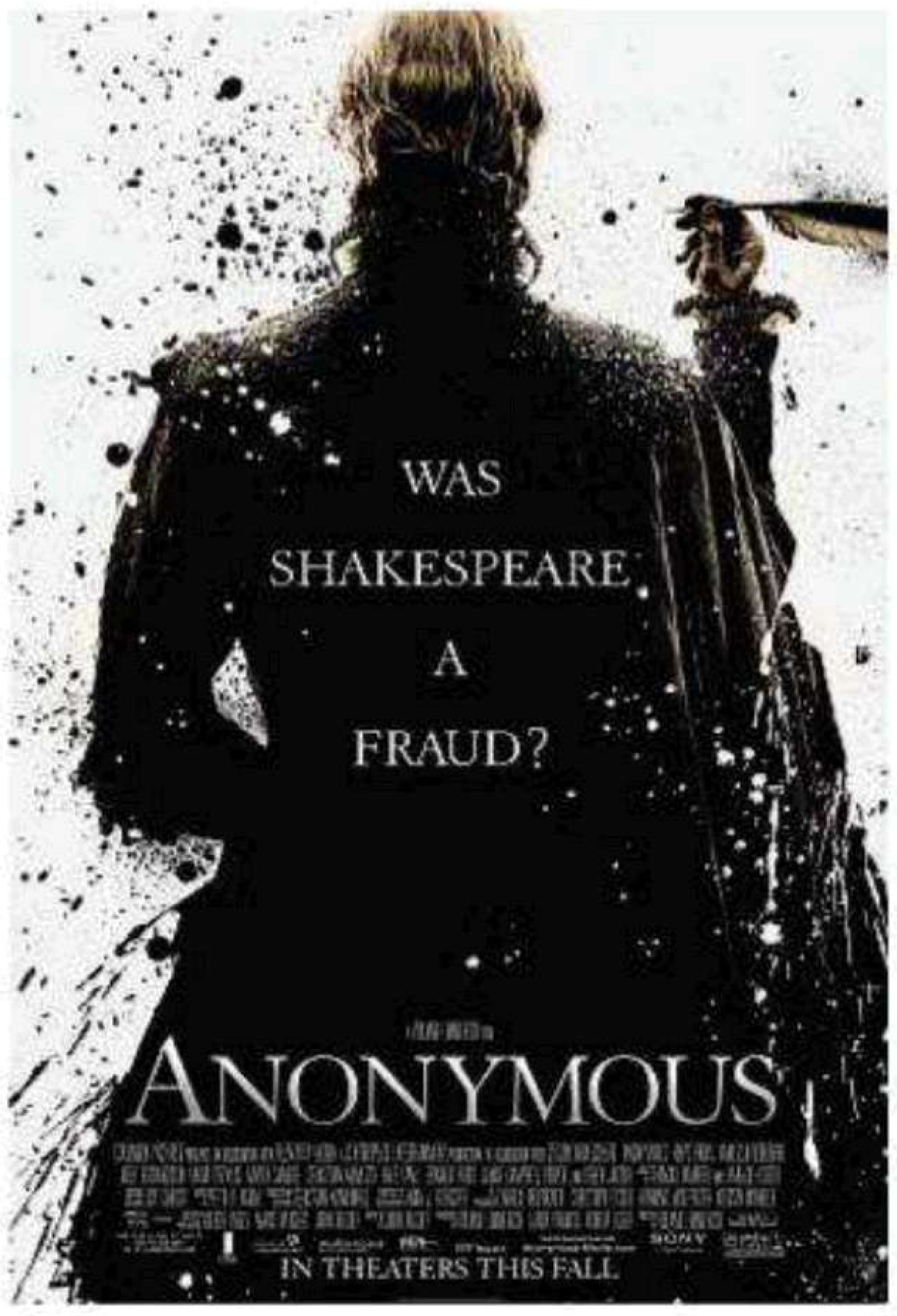
ABOVE: GETTY IMAGES / OLI SCARFF

a poor caricaturist working in bad light (as Stratfordian scholar Jonathan Bate maintains, as well as suggesting that the pen was filched by souvenir hunters prior to Dugdale) could the empty hands of his Shakespeare rest on a woolsack because the monument originally represented his father, a dealer in wool, as Richard Kennedy argues? [2]

Peter Beal entered the fray in tacit support of the 'Woolsack Man' theory, warning against accepting the word of old antiquarians as to the accuracy of their works, and concluding that: "This and other questions raised by the Dugdale drawing can only be answered if it is taken seriously by scholars and not consigned indignantly to the waste bin because it does not tally with cherished conceptions." [3]

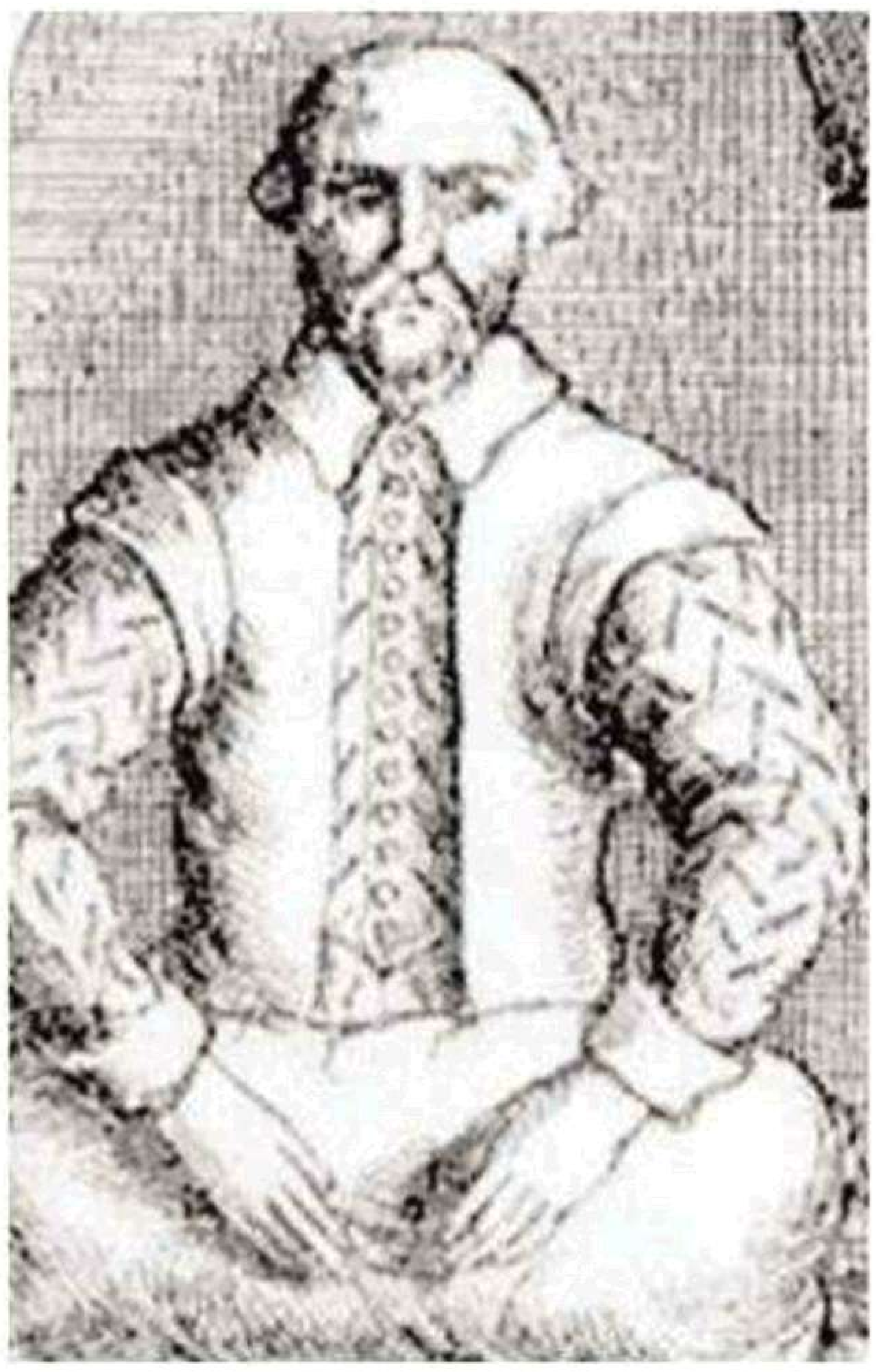
A fascinating skirmish, but one that did nothing to extinguish sceptical questions: was the monument altered to bolster the myth of Shakespeare the writer, or was Dugdale a slipshod portraitist?

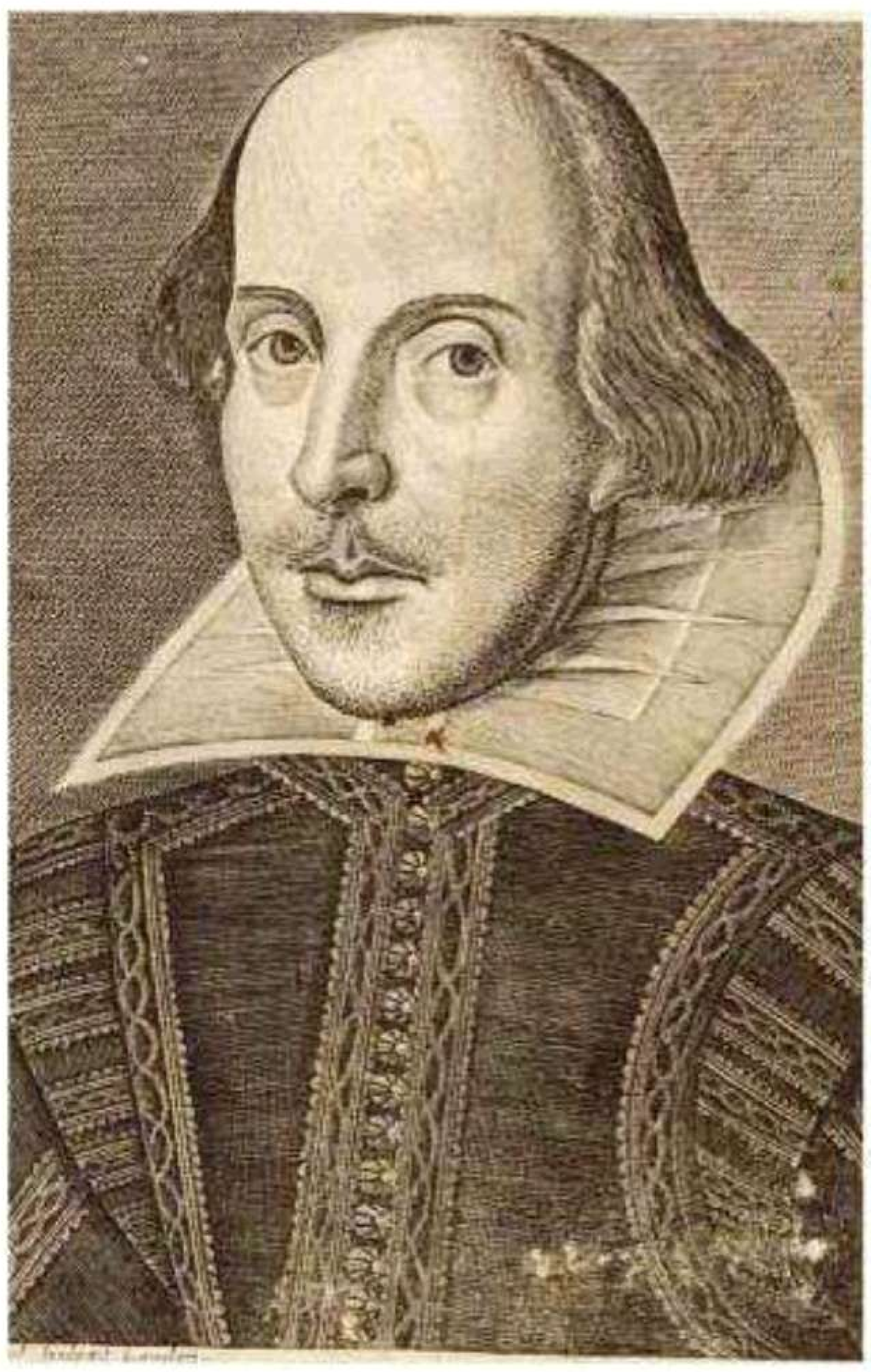
The Bacon Cult



The lines on the tablet below the bust have long been a source of interest for cryptologists with their apparent challenge to the reader to discover the name of the person whom "envious death" has placed within the monument. [4] Peter Dawkins is one of the latest researchers to find in these lines a simple cypher for 'Fra Bacon' – Sir Francis Bacon, the Rosicrucian head (along with his brother Anthony) of a group dedicated to "some great aim" along Hermetic/Cabbalistic lines, an immense project of knowledge classification known as the 'Great Instauration'. [5] Fellow Baconist Barry Clarke has also developed the theory of Shakespeare's canon as a subset of Bacon's master plan. [6] The sole aim of Bacon's Instauration, he told me, "was to revise the entire teaching of Aristotle. It was a vast intellectual project, which included scientific, moral and political philosophy. He stated 'so after my death I may yet perhaps, through the kindling of this new light in the darkness of philosophy, be the means of making this age famous to posterity', which suggests to me that he worked alone." My concern that Bacon had enough on his plate as a philosopher, statesman, lawyer and scientist to have dashed off the works of Shakespeare *as well* is no problem for Clarke: "It is a myth that Bacon had little free time… In fact, he was so under-employed that at one point he was arrested for debt. His leisure time diminished in 1607 with his appointment as Solicitor General and vanished in 1613 when he became Attorney General, which is when the Shakespeare output ceased." Clarke agrees with my suggestion that the efforts of the early Baconians, with their cryptographic machinery and concealed texts, the sublime poetry reduced to a mere by-product of mind-bogglingly artful concealment, "undoubtedly undermined" the case for Bacon. Baconian claims have moved on since, in surveying the history of Baconism up to his time, John Michell observed how "The Baconian cult at its most luxuriant is an awesome and awful thing [..] It is a grand vision, and Bacon's perspective was also grand. It is easy to

JERRY GLOVER





ABOVE LEFT: The monument to Shakespeare in Stratford Holy Trinity Church. **ABOVE CENTRE:** The Dugdale engraving showing the woolpack. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Droeshout engraving from the frontispiece of the first complete quarto edition. **BELOW:** Sir Francis Bacon, an early contender.

become immersed in Baconism."[7] The luxuriance of Bacon's candidacy is now defined not just by cryptography, but also by esoterica, and how deep into these matters any prospective champion of his authorship dares to look.

One who has dared is Petter Amundsen who began to assemble his Baconian theory eight years ago, culminating in a documentary series for Norwegian television in 2009.[8] Amundsen was kind enough to distil it for me: "I believe I can prove there are Rosicrucian signatures in the First Folio, and that this book and the 1609 Sonnets describe a road map leading to the Rosicrucian vault." Which, by the way, is located on Oak Island, Nova Scotia: the 'Money Pit' notorious for the numerous attempts to excavate its secrets. "This vault contains the lamp of the Temple and manuscripts, including Shakespearean ones. Of course, this is hard to believe, but many do when they see what evidence I can produce. I believe Shakespearean drama and poetry is basically a product created by two persons: Sir Francis Bacon and Sir Henry Neville, hence their names on the Northumberland manuscript. There are of course other reasons why I believe this."[9]

The manuscript in question has long been a talisman for Anti-Stratfordians. Unearthed in the library of Northumberland House in 1867, this collection of Bacon's writings has a contents sheet that includes the scribbled names of Shakespeare (in various spellings), Bacon and Sir Henry Neville's names, titles of Shakespeare plays, and a shortened version of the longest word in Shakespeare's immense vocabulary: *Honorificabiletunine.* This genuine Elizabethan document precedes the first appearance of Shakespeare's name in print, and indicates that Bacon or Neville owned copies of Shakespeare's history plays, apparently in manuscript.[10] What were they doing with them? Consider also the more recent enigma of the Elizabethan mural discovered in a St Albans coach house that shows a scene from the allegory of *Venus and Adonis.*[11] This mural has symbolic links with Rosicrucianism, newly arrived from the Continent via France or Germany, and even includes a sketch of Bacon's nearby house. Is it a coincidence that this is also the subject of Shakespeare's first printed poem? It is just one of many curious anomalies Stratfordians would prefer not to address.

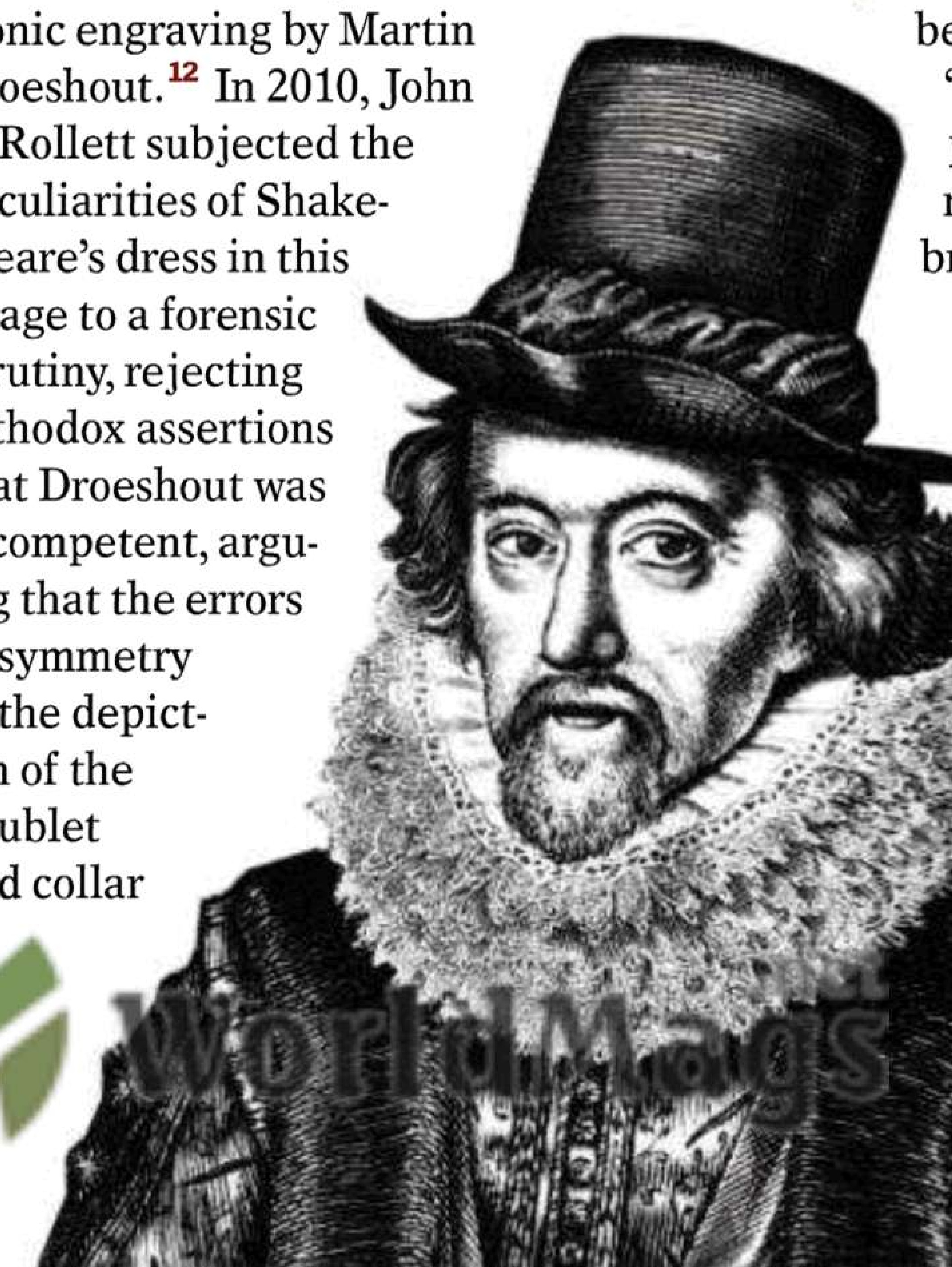
The Oxfordians

And so, on to literature's most sacred site, Shakespeare's birthplace, where visitors are first led on a darkened walkthrough of projections and spot-lit relics. After being shown a splendid Elizabethan gold signet ring bearing the initials 'WS' found in Holy Trinity churchyard (nice coincidence), we shuffle into a room where a veiled glimpse of a school desk at which the young Shakespeare might have learned his "small Latine and lesse Greeke" is caught. The theatricality invokes sacredness and reverence. When cued spotlights light a copy of the First Folio, the first collection of Shakespeare's works, we all surge towards it to view up close the iconic engraving by Martin Droeshout.[12] In 2010, John M Rollett subjected the peculiarities of Shakespeare's dress in this image to a forensic scrutiny, rejecting orthodox assertions that Droeshout was incompetent, arguing that the errors of symmetry in the depiction of the doublet and collar "make it difficult to resist the interpretation that the person being depicted is being subtly and surreptitiously mocked", indications of "a deliberate agenda of some kind."[13] Quite what, he does not say.

And then there are the facial anomalies: two left eyes, lopsided hair, and an outsize head. Why are there no allegorical figures surrounding the author, in accordance with tradition? How could this bizarre portrait have passed muster for publishers of one of the most expensive books ever produced at that time in England when books were costlier than furniture? Mike Webb, who recently achieved the rare distinction of having directed every one of Shakespeare's plays, gave me the explanation of a steadfast Stratfordian: "To me, it is simply the work of a very inexperienced engraver, probably 'cheap'. And I believe it plausible that the folks that knew Shakespeare probably didn't like the first engraved image because it didn't look like Shakespeare to them, so they insisted on some changes, and since we are not dealing with a digital 'Photoshop-able' image, that those changes are in the engraving that was published."[14]

For Charles Beauclerk, these anomalies are not errors, they are allegorical symbolism, setting the stage for an actor who became the front man for the true author: "Looked at as a whole, the sitter is indeed presented in the guise of a Harlequin… a masked servant in patched costume, celebrated for his gluttony and slow-wittedness. Yet the collar and rich-looking doublet bespeak a man of social standing, reinforcing the impression that this is a dual figure. Far from bemoaning the artist's 'error', one is inclined to praise the skill of his carefully elaborated design."[15]

Thus begins Beauclark's account of the secret life of Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, a candidate who



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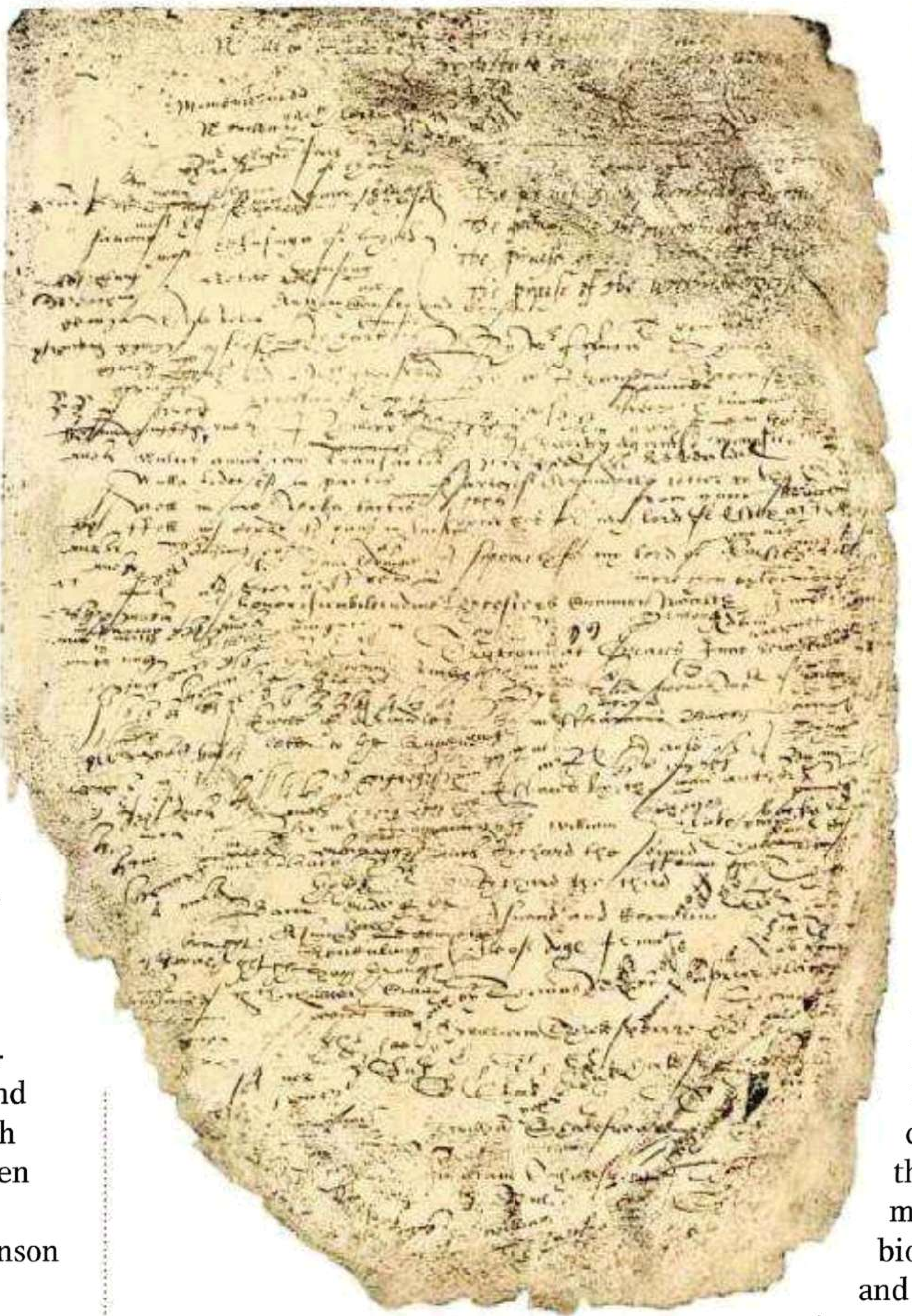
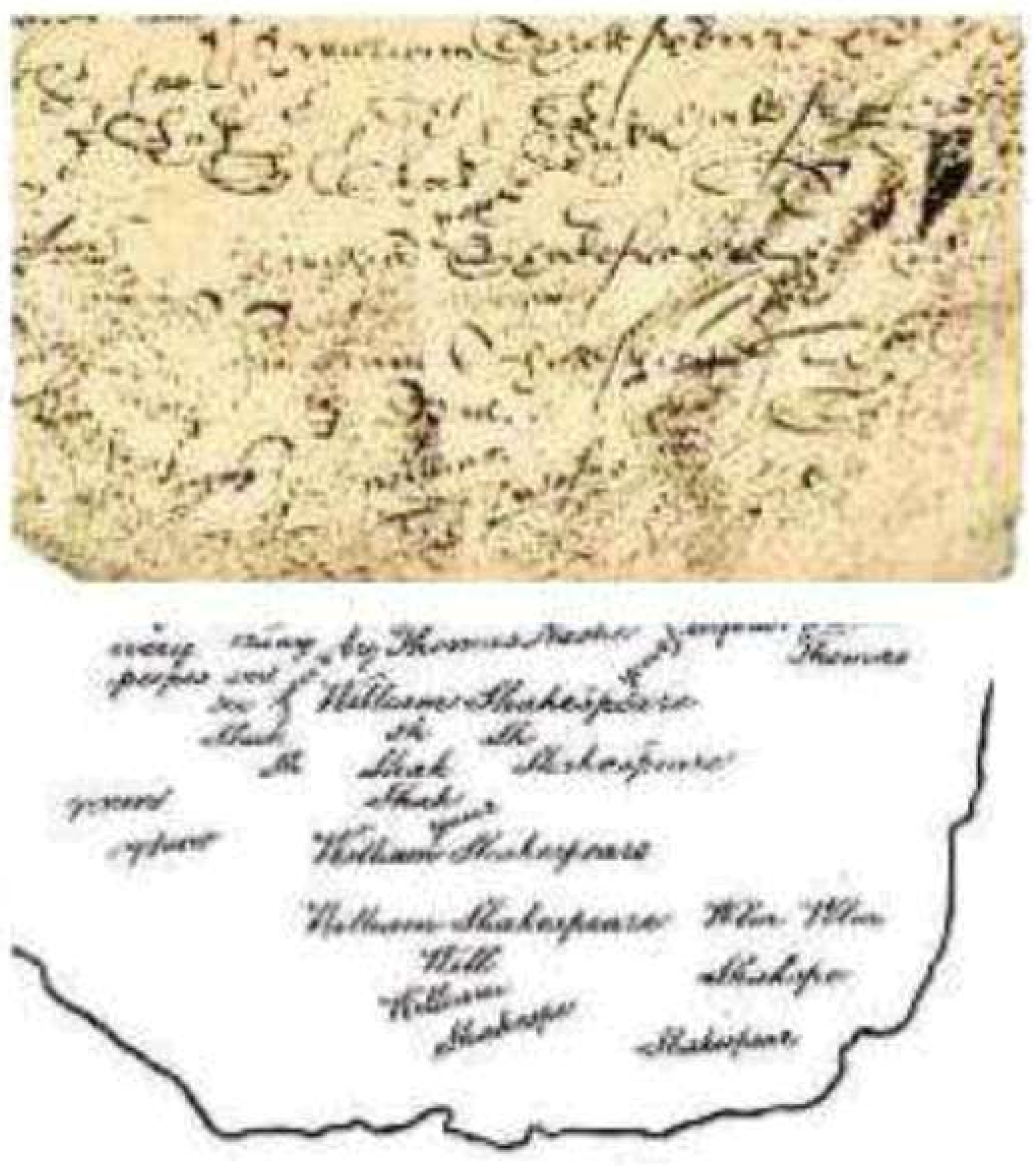
inspires more crypto-biographies than any other claimant. Beauclark is the latest (though not the first) to divulge that Oxford was the illegitimate son of Elizabeth I and Thomas Seymour, *and* the subsequent father of her secret son raised as Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, the "fair youth" of the Sonnets. And if you recognise any of the potential issues raised by all this in themes from, say, *Hamlet* or *King Lear* – dispossessed kingship, incest, alienation, concealment, playacting – this is because they are indeed autobiographical messages direct from the real author, Edward de Vere's, own experience. It is an irresistible story of Elizabethan high intrigue. Small wonder, then, that the forthcoming Hollywood movie, *Anonymous*, written by John Orloff and directed by Roland Emmerich, unfolds this same plotline.





LEFT: A page from a collection of Bacon's works found in Sir Henry Neville's home in Northumberland carried repeated occurrences of a Shakespeare signature. Someone perfecting an autograph or a forger rehearsing his trade?

Marlowe's ghost

The cryptic affair of the First Folio continues with Ben Jonson's celebratory and celebrated elegy for Shakespeare which opens it. Anti-Stratfordian Daryl Pinksen reads in it hints of a charade to get a blacklisted author published. When Jonson calls the author "A Moniment without a tomb" he clearly seems to be talking about a living person; odd when William Shakespeare had already been under the floor of Holy Trinity church for seven years. So who is Jonson referring to? In contrast to Oxfordian authors who amass heaps of circumstantial autobiographical evidence, Pinksen draws on his scientific training to take a more reductionist approach to the problem. Using the marked similarities between the work of Christopher Marlowe (who started his writing career first), and the earliest works of Shakespeare, Pinksen argues that orthodoxy's acknowledgment of Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare stops short of the full truth: that the resemblance exists because the works were *written by the same author.* But since Marlowe is supposed to have been killed in an argument in 1593 at the age of 29, how was this possible? Pinksen points to the shady intelligence community Marlowe was spying for (making him powerful friends), and his activities as a freethinking atheist (making him powerful enemies), a combination resulting in forced exile and blacklisting. The discovery in 1925 of the coroner's report of the 'Deptford incident', with its fishy account of the row that led to Marlowe's fatal 'accident', has fuelled conspiracy theories that Marlowe was in fact assassinated. But Pinksen does not buy the murder explanation, finding it "unnecessarily complicated" when seen in context of the day's events.[16] Just a few days after Marlowe exits from the world stage, Shakespeare's first printed work, the poem *Venus and Adonis*, was published. Its relationship to Marlowe's unpublished *Hero and Leander* forces scholars to conjecture that Shakespeare had access to Marlowe's unpublished works. But what if the Marlowe was the real author?

"Marlowe is present as a 'ghost' in every book about Shakespeare"

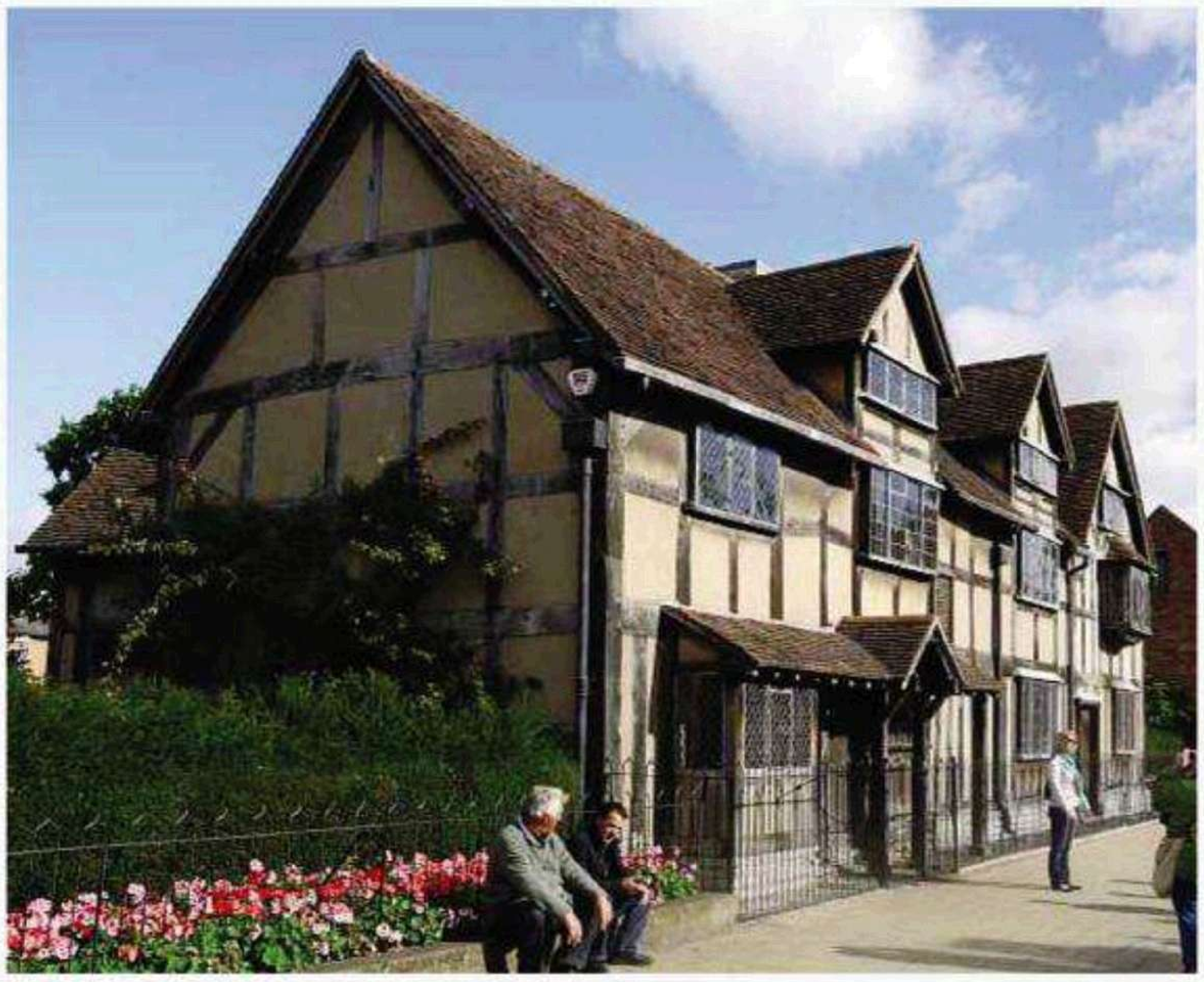
Pinksen finds common ground with the Oxfordian tendency to highlight the theme of exile that runs through the Shakespeare canon. But the resemblance ends there. For him, the Oxfordian method of "strip-mining the plays for biographical linkages" is "futile",[17] and he prefers to point up the mirroring word-lengths used by Marlowe and Shakespeare (work started by another physicist, TC Mendhall, in 1897), while highlighting curiously disparaging references to Shakespeare in the dramas.[18] "The case for Marlowe is the only alternative which is based on scholarship," he told me. "I've read hundreds of books on Shakespeare; Oxford, Bacon, and the rest of them hardly warrant a mention. Marlowe, on the other hand, is present as a "ghost" in every book one reads about Shakespeare's development as a writer. If there is a problem with the Shakespeare theory, then Marlowe (I would argue) is the only rational alternative for someone who values research and scholarship." The way forward for Pinksen lies in the 'disconcerting' influence of Ovid on Shakespeare, which for him means two things: "an intense belief in the power of poetry to provide literary immortality, and an awareness that the printed book is the vehicle to achieve that immortality. Yet the biographical Shakespeare, we are told, showed no interest in the printing and publication of his work. I find this disconnect between professed belief and lack of practice difficult to reconcile, not to mention the fact that this disconnect does not seem to bother scholars in the slightest." A small window in Westminster Abbey commemorates the dates of Marlowe's life as "1564–1593?" – the question mark hinting that others believe in the possibility of him surviving that strange night in Deptford.

The Crucible of Creation

The list of claimants is still growing. Robin Williams has revived the candidacy of Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke

THE REST IS SILENCE

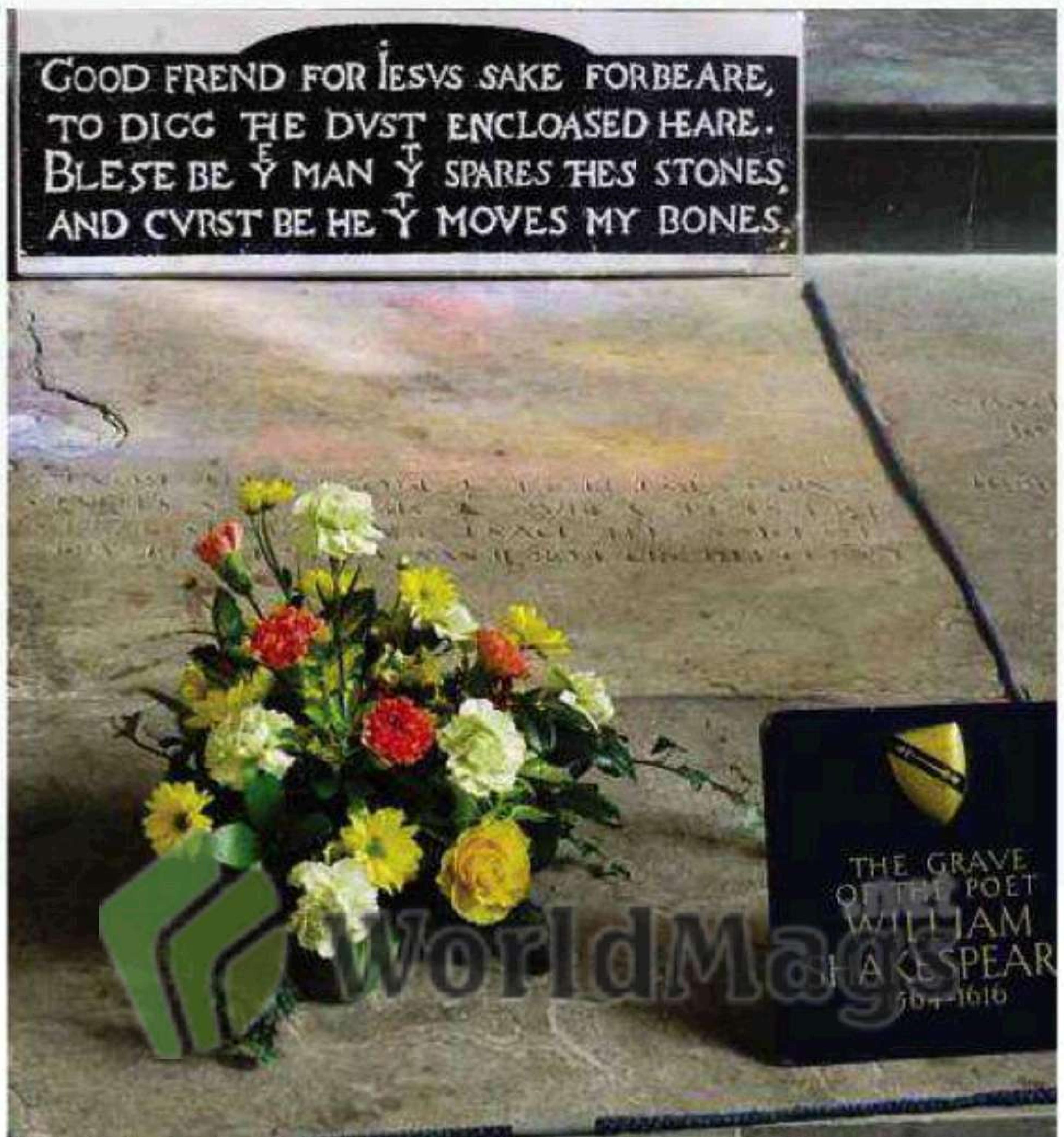
Shakespeare remains the world's most famous writer, but there's a surprising lack of hard evidence concerning his literary endeavours



LEFT: The house in Stratford where Shakespeare was born and lived his early life.

BELOW: The plaque on Shakespeare's grave, cursing anyone who disturbs his bones.

JERRY GLOVER


GOOD FREND FOR IESVS SAKE FORBEARE,
TO DIGG THE DVST ENCLOASED HEARE.
BLESE BE $\overset{E}{Y}$ MAN $\overset{T}{Y}$ SPARES THES STONES,
AND CVRST BE HE $\overset{T}{Y}$ MOVES MY BONES.
THE GRAVE
OF THE POET
WILLIAM
SHAKESPEAR
1564-1616

JERRY GLOVER

The case against Shakespeare comes from a lack of documentary evidence linking him to writing. Most Stratfordians are happy to accept the attribution of the plays and poems to the name on the title pages of the first printed editions, while ignoring plays attributed to him by publishers that studies show he did *not* write, and leaving it at that. They have little choice. Apart from a couple of pages of a play tentatively thought to be in Shakespeare's handwriting, no manuscripts or drafts have ever been found. No poems, no diaries. Not even juvenilia. Just mature, sublime printed works. And this is just the beginning for dissenters, who use the issue of the yawning disconnect between the printed works bearing Shakespeare's name and the historical facts of his life as an empty stage on which to strut their alternate claimants.

The paucity of evidence for Shakespeare having penned anything apart from his name *is* decidedly strange. No correspondence from him has emerged, and the only letter to him that has turned up was never sent. Of the 60-odd documents listing him as an actor or for matters concerning tax or business, none of them confirm him as a writer. In contrast, for every other noted writer of the time there are various forms of evidence for their literary activity. No one in Stratford seems to have known Shakespeare was a writer, and none of his relatives recouped on his theatre investments or tried to exploit his unpublished plays after his death. Apart from a couple of volumes of poetry at the Shakespeare Birthplace, carefully framed as *possibly* belonging to the young William, none of his books has been found, nor even any trace of him having borrowed any. As for the missing manuscripts, 80 per cent of the plays performed in London between 1564 and 1642 are lost, which puts their present absence into perspective. But why did Shakespeare omit them in his own last will and testament, along with any books?[1] Despite being pirated by publishers in his lifetime, he never sought recompense for the loss this represented to his income, and yet he pursued borrowers of relatively small sums through the courts, and spent handsomely. It's as if Shakespeare cared nothing for his life's work. Prospero breaking his staff?

Shakespeare's silence extends to events normally eulogised by writers of the time. He wrote nothing to mark the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the ascension of James I in 1604, the death of Henry, Prince of Wales, in 1612; and nothing to celebrate the marriage of Princess Elizabeth in 1612, or the investiture of Charles, Prince of Wales, in 1613 – not a word about them.

Conversely, when Shakespeare died in 1616, there were no eulogies, no tributes, and no record of his funeral. The author of *The New Metamorphosis* named over 30 poets and playwrights of the years 1600–1615 – but not Shakespeare. Twenty-four years after his death, Ben Jonson published a work in which he recommended the best English writers, omitting mention of Shakespeare. How could the "Soul of the Age" and the "Star of Poets", as Jonson termed his old friend in the First Folio eulogies, have slipped his mind? Perhaps it was a final bitter slighting of the unlettered provincial whose talent had outshone all the university wits. Maybe there were other reasons. Diana Price noted that "If Shakespeare personally interacted with any of the opinion-setters, decision-makers, or influential historical personages of the time, the historical record is inexplicably and uncharacteristically silent."[2] Even the guide I spoke to at the Birthplace house finally admitted that there is "no copper-bottomed answer" to the mystery of the SAQ. The affair is like a theme out of a Shakespeare problem play, one where we are asked to judge how far the absence of evidence infers the evidence of absence.

New evidence that might plug a sizable gap in Shakespeare's life has recently come to light. A seminary for English Catholic priests in Rome touted several cryptic signatures in its guest-books as Shakespeare's on the opening of an exhibition in December 2009. The most suggestive of these figures, "Gulielmus Clerkue Stratfordiensis" (William the Clerk of Stratford), arrived in 1589, slap-bang in Shakespeare's 'lost years' between 1585 when he left Stratford, and 1592 when he appeared in London.[3] This placing of Shakespeare in Rome at the end of a pilgrimage during the height of anti-Catholic paranoia in England impinges on several issues relating to Shakespeare's life and the authorship question. One bulwark of the Anti-Stratfordian position is the overseas exploits of various claimants, used to explain a third of the plays' foreign settings, contrasting with the (hitherto assumed) untravelled life of Shakespeare of Stratford. It will be interesting to see how the various sides in the authorship controversy deal with this new information.

NOTES

1 Stratfordians contend they fell under "goodes, chattel".

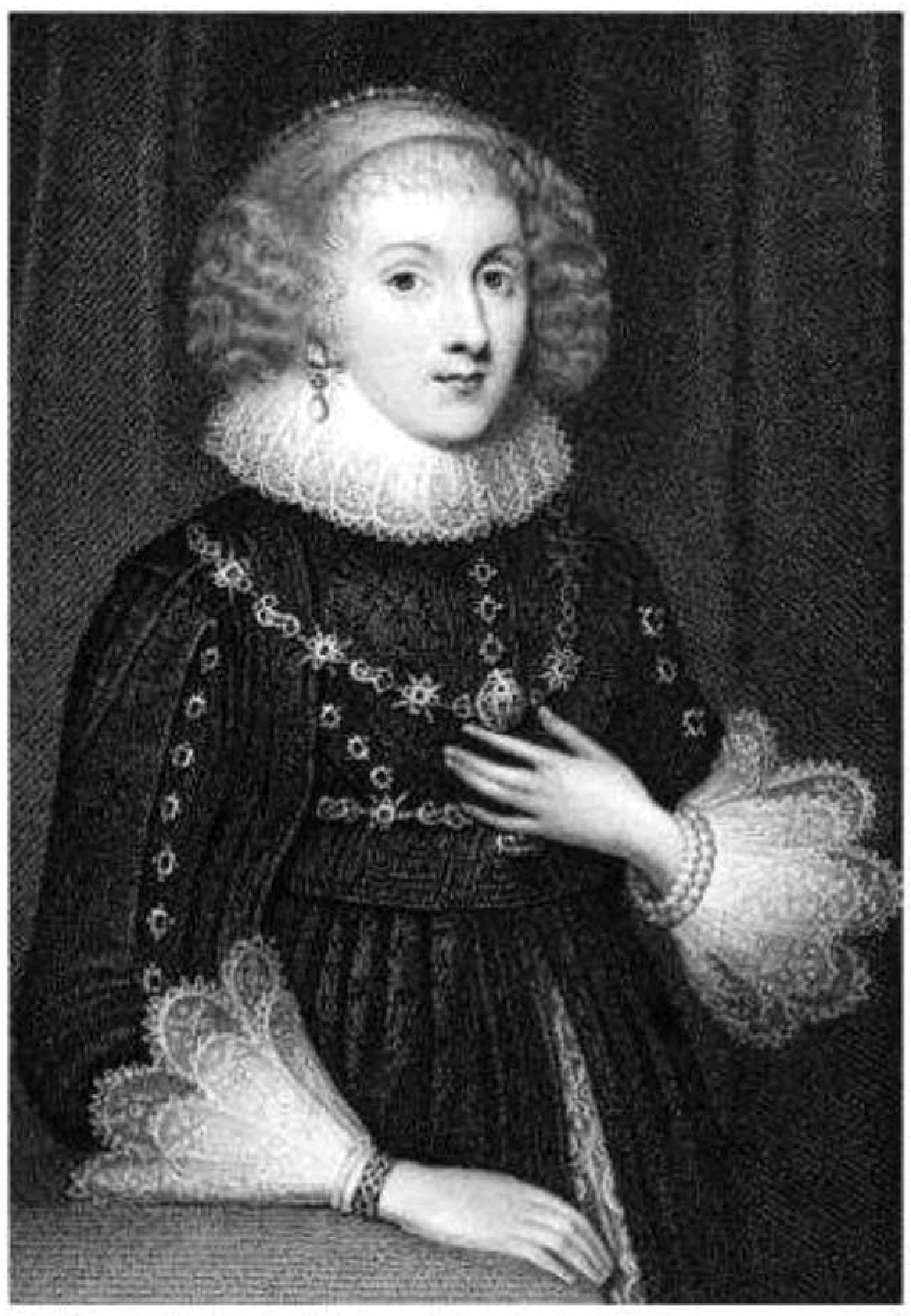
2 Cited in Robin Williams: *Sweet Swan of Avon*, Peachpit Presss, 2006 p10.

3 It was already known that dramatist and anti-Catholic informer, Anthony Munday (1560?–1633), enrolled at the college too, possibly to spy. Interestingly, he subsequently collaborated with Shakespeare on *Sir Thomas More*.

(1561–1621).[19] Amelia Lanier (1569–1645), the first Englishwoman to become a published poet, has been promoted from the ‘Dark Lady’ of Shakespeare’s sonnets (according to several authors) to the Bard himself by John Hudson.[20] The occurrence of the name and motto on the curious Northumberland Manuscript of Sir Henry Neville (1562–1615) is the springboard for Brenda James’s cryptographically-paved journey into the secret literary life of this Falstaffian courtier and diplomat.[21] In an echo of Calvin Hoffman’s excavation of Thomas Walsingham’s tomb in 1956, Alan Saunders’s advocacy of Fulke Greville’s (1554–1628) candidacy led to an endoscopic investigation of his tomb in 2010 in the anticipation of finding the Bard’s manuscripts. They weren’t there.[22]

Now that the questions are being given serious academic scrutiny under the guidance of William Leahy, there is the prospect of one day seeing some of the candidates unite under a single banner, since for Leahy the case for any one single author is too simplistic. Shakespeare’s articulacy, at least four times the average vocabulary, suggests to him “five or six” highly educated writers, working with Shakespeare, buyer and broker of plays for the Globe theatre.

“My feeling is that he would write bits of those plays,” Leahy told me. “He would build a skeleton and others would contribute, and over time it would be a kind of collaboration. But not in the sense where four people would sit around a table and work out a script. What I’m describing is a kind of untidy way of approaching this and this is not what people want. They want – and I don’t mean this in a negative or a pejorative sense – they want a simple solution: one author who we can say is a genius who we can attribute all the plays and poems to. What I’m saying is, I think it’s a very complex and ambiguous reality and we just have to accept that.”



LEFT: A female Shakespeare? Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, has her champions as a candidate.

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This view chimes with my research, but also with my experience of having worked with actors and writers on developing material in backstage situations where, fired by excitement and pressure, egos dissolve and bleed together in the common goal of ‘nailing’ a line or a scene, giving rise to instances of collaboration that belie the clean distinctions of the final credits. This is the crucible of dramatic creation that escapes a good many researchers on both sides of the argument, happy for their candidates to work in relative isolation. When two minds meet a third is created; and somewhere within the many conjunctions highlighted by Anti-Stratfordians, links perhaps too subtle to ever fully disentangle, is perhaps where the true identity of ‘our ever-living poet’, resides: a figure simultaneously fictional and real, born of a company of voices, some of whose contributions are known to us, others forever lost.

Jonathan Bate holds that Anti-Stratfordians are in thrall to a romantic idea of authorship, “attempting to write an identity for themselves” vicariously through their candidates.[23] Yet as John Michell also observed, “The Stratfordians are no less victims of their own beliefs than the Baconians or other dogmatists. They too are ‘theorists’.”[24] In the face of such an immense task, the Anti-Stratfordian tradition of unmasking the ‘real’ Shakespeare by re-mythologising his identity, asserting one name above others, diminishes the undercurrents that a wider look at the question is apt to bring to light. Having done so, we might wonder if Gulielmus Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon was the one who most easily moved between, and brought together, a combination of talents, concealed and exiled poets included, cannily drawing on and honing their contributions while evolving a role for himself as the guiding entrepreneur and ‘frontman’ of a canon, the full origins and purpose of which even he did not know – indeed, did not care to know, provided his chief ambition of becoming a wealthy gentleman remained on course.

The vision of the Bard most undermined by any Anti-Stratfordian effort is surely the one that is doggedly upheld by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, where solitary Will scratches away in his humble lodging with nothing but a few books, copious industry, and, of course, his godlike genius: the curriculum-approved, tourist version created by Victorian entrepreneurs. A wider look at the controversy, however, may yet reaffirm the Stratford man’s key role in the creation of this everlasting work, albeit in a new sense that – barring some fantastic discovery – is never likely to prevail in the mythology of ‘William Shakespeare’. FT

Author biography

JERRY GLOVER is an independent researcher of historical enigmata, and has contributed to *Fortean Times* since 2001. He has written and produced numerous productions for the stage, radio, and the small screen.

NOTES

1 John Michell: *Who Wrote Shakespeare?*, Thames and Hudson, 1996. Highly recommended.

2 http://bit.ly/pnYpWw (webpages.charter.net).

3 http://bit.ly/o2Yozx (timesonline.co.uk).

4 STAY PASSENGER, WHY GOEST THOU BY SO FAST, / READ IF THOU CANST, WHOM ENVIOUS DEATH HATH PLAST, / WITHIN IN THIS MONUMENT SHAKSPEARE: WITH WHOME, / QUICK NATURE DIDE: WHOSE NAME DOTH DECK Y TOMBE, / FAR MORE, TEN COST: SIETH ALL Y HE HATH WRITT, / LEAVES LIVING ART, BUT PAGE, TO SERVE HIS WITT.

5 Peter Dawkins: *The Shakespeare Enigma*, Polair Publishing, 2004, pp378–80.

6 Barry R Clarke: *The Shakespeare Puzzle*, Lulu.com, 2007. Available as a download from http://bit.ly/qXMJG0 (barryispuzzled.com).

7 Michell, *op.cit.*, p129.

8 Erlend Loe & Petter Amundsen: *The Organ Player*, Cappelen, 2006.

9 The theory of Oak Island holding Shakespeare’s manuscripts goes back to Dr Burrell F Ruth in 1939. See William S Crooker: *Oak Island Gold*, Nimbus, 1993, p149. See **FT172:30**; **176:73**.

10 http://bit.ly/oidkNI (fbrt.org.uk).

11 http://bit.ly/pwUh6T (sirbacon.org).

12 This was one of two widely-accepted life portraits of Shakespeare (along with the monument bust) until Stanley Wells of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust announced the ‘Cobbe portrait’ as a life-painting of Shakespeare in March 2009. See http://bit.ly/aVkJC (guardian.co.uk).

13 John Rollet: “Shakespeare’s Impossible Doublet”, *Brief Chronicles* Vol. II (2010) 9. The National Portrait Gallery holds that Droeshout copied a lost image of Shakespeare’s head and shoulders, adding the doublet.

14 Since there were two Martin Droeshouts, a younger and an elder, the First Folio engraver’s identity is uncertain, but evidence found by June Schlueter in 2007 points to the younger.

15 Charles Beauclark: *Shakespeare’s Lost Kingdom*, Grove Press, 2010, pxii.

16 Daryl Pinksen: *Marlowe’s Ghost*, Universe, 2008, pp30–35.

17 Leaving this approach to another Marlovian, Samuel Blumenfeld: *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection*, MacFarland, 2008.

18 The strange appearance of William of Arden in *As You Like It*, and Sogliardo in Ben Jonson’s *Every Man out of His Humour*. See Pinksen, *op.cit.*, pp116–125, 182–189.

19 Robin Williams: *Sweet Swan of Avon*, Peachpit Press, 2006.

20 John Hudson: “Amelia Bassano Lanier, A New Paradigm”, *The Oxfordian*, vol XI, 2008.

21 Brenda James & William Rubinstein: *The Truth Will Out*, Pearson, 2005, and Brenda James: *Henry Neville and the Shakespeare Code*, Music for Strings, 2008.

22 “Nothing of real interest was found, other than rubble, and some suggestion that the monument may have been opened on a previous occasion.” Email correspondence with Terry Babbage, Parish Administrator, 16 Dec 2010.

23 Jonathan Bate: *The Genius of Shakespeare*, Picador, 1997, p96.

24 Michell, *op.cit.*, p257.

Eureka!

BARRY BALDWIN recounts the story of the Eureka machine, a bizarre Victorian computer that composed Latin verses at the turn of a handle, and wonders if this Heath Robinson contraption was an inspiration for Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

PHOTOS: Alfred Gillett Trust

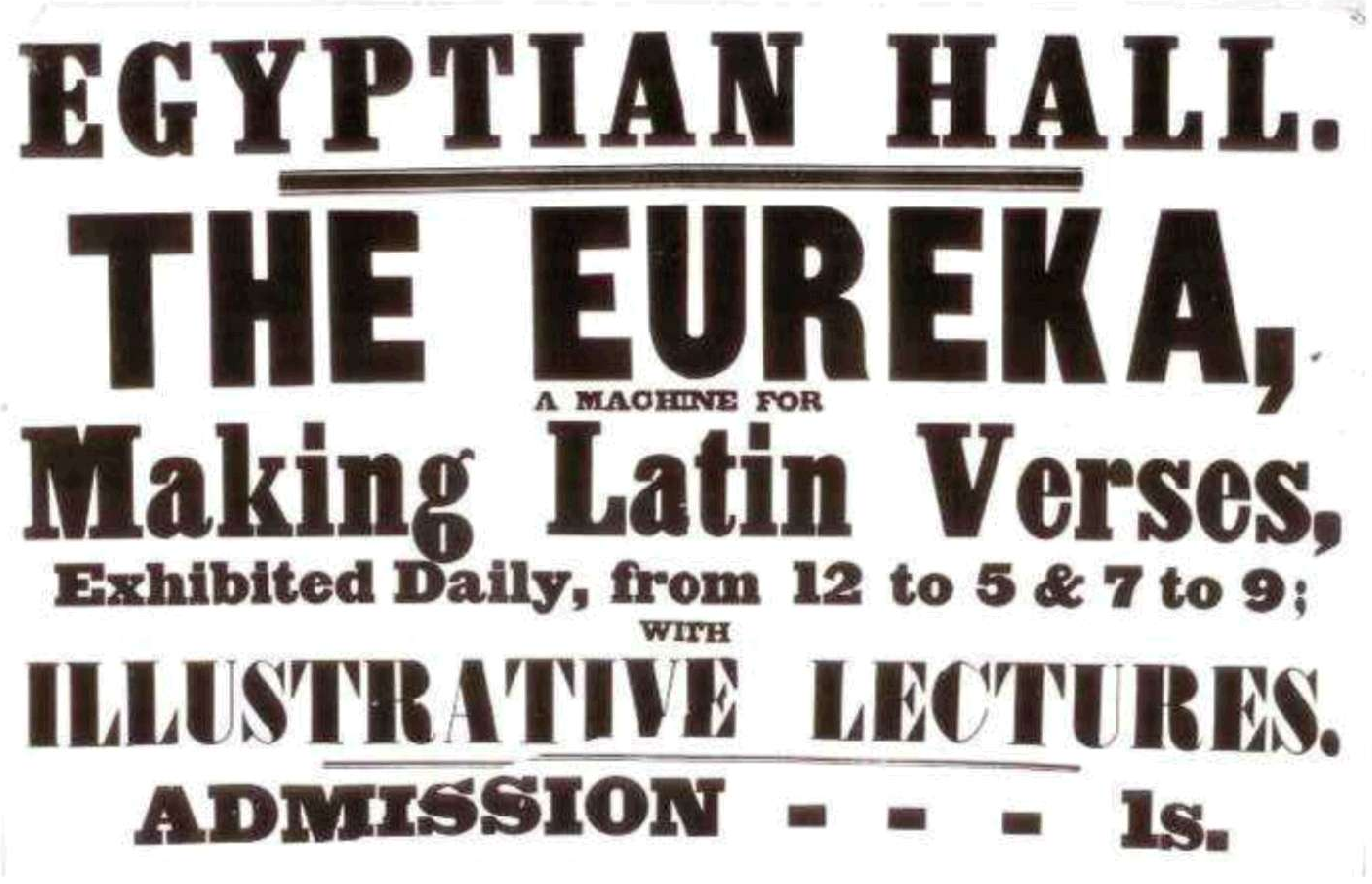
In 1845, this advertising handbill appeared in London:

THE EUREKA
A MACHINE FOR
MAKING LATIN VERSES
EXHIBITED DAILY
From 12 to 5, and from 7 to 9 O'Clock
WITH ILLUSTRATIVE LECTURES
ADMITTANCE ONE SHILLING

Despite this steep admission – a bob was a bob in 1845 – *hoi polloi* flocked (how many would today?) to see it in action at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, where it garnered much media attention and a handsome profit. The *Illustrated London News* (19 July 1845) ran this article (with picture):

"The exterior of the machine resembles, in form, a small bureau book-case; in the frontispiece of which, through an aperture, the verses appear in succession as they are composed.

"The machine is described by the Inventor as neither more nor less than a practical illustration of the law of evolution. The process of composition is not by words already formed, but from separate letters. This fact is obvious, although some spectators may, probably, have mistaken the effect for the cause – the result for the principle, which is that of Kaleidoscopic evolution; and, as an illustration of this principle it is that this machine is interesting – a principle affording a far greater scope of extension than has hitherto been attempted. The machine contains letters in an alphabetical arrangement. Out of these through the medium of numbers, rendered tangible by being expressed by Indentures on wheel-work, the instrument selects such as are requisite to form the verse conceived; the components of words suited to the hexameters being alone previously calculated, the harmonious combination of which will be found to be practically interminable.



EGYPTIAN HALL.
THE EUREKA,
A MACHINE FOR
Making Latin Verses,
Exhibited Daily, from 12 to 5 & 7 to 9;
WITH
ILLUSTRATIVE LECTURES.
ADMISSION - - - 1s.

"The rate of composition is about one verse per minute, or 60 in an hour. Each verse remains stationary and visible a sufficient time for a copy of it to be taken; after which the machine gives an audible notice that the line is about to be decomposed. Each letter of the verse is then slowly and separately removed into its former alphabetical arrangement; on which the machine stops, until another verse be required. Or, by withdrawing the stop, it may be made to go on continually, producing in one day and night, or 24 hours, about 1,440 Latin verses; or, in a whole week (Sundays included) about 10,000.

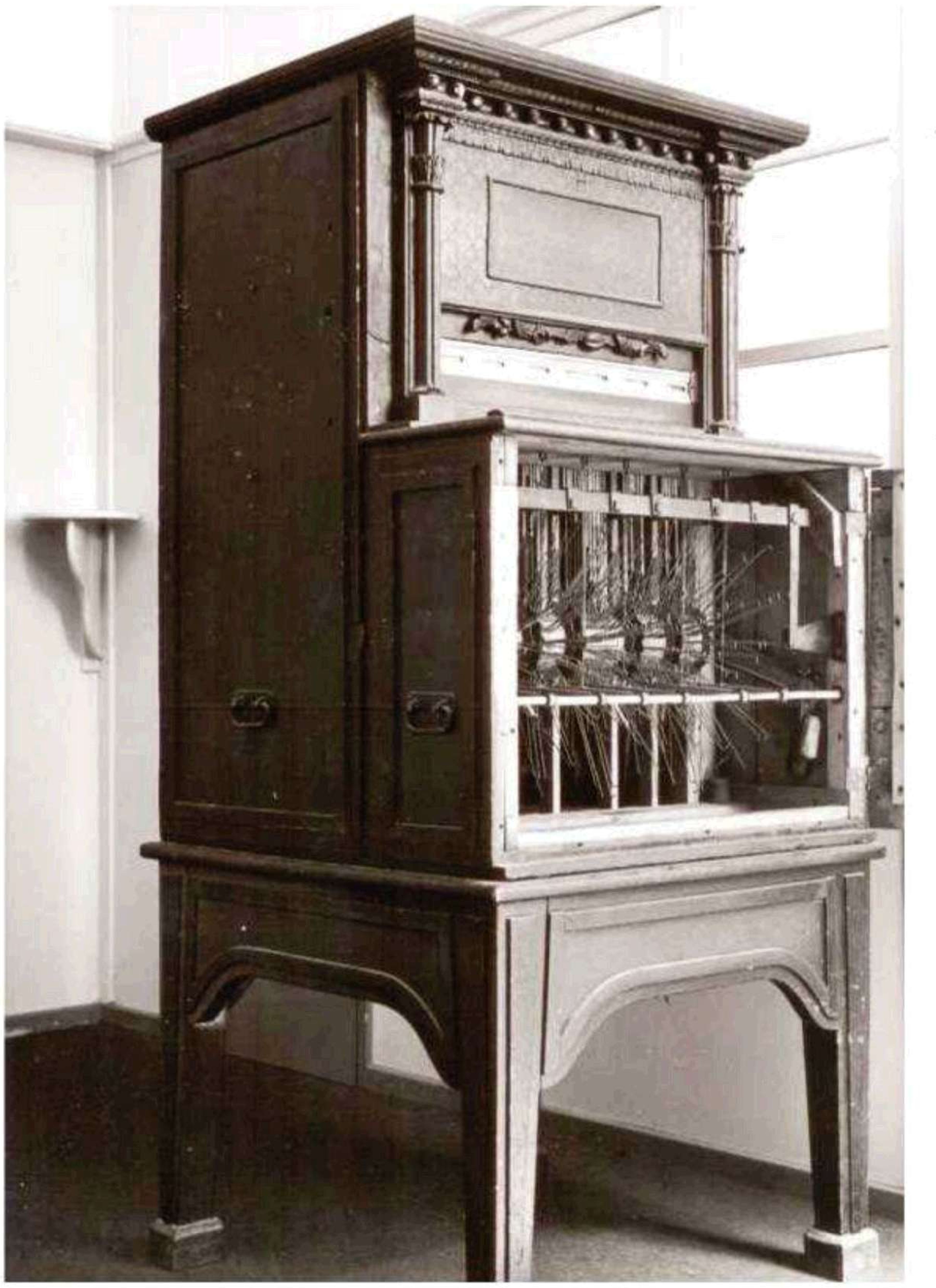
"During the composition of each line, a cylinder in the interior of the machine performs the National Anthem. As soon as the verse is complete, a short pause of silence ensues.

"On the announcement that the line is about to be broken up, the cylinder performs the air of 'Fly not yet', until every letter is returned into its proper place in the alphabet. There is on the frontispiece of the machine, above the line of verse, a tablet, bearing the following Inscription:

"Full many a gem, of purest ray serene,
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear
And many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its fragrance on the desert air.
Full many a thought, of character sublime,
Conceived in darkness, here shall be unrolled.
The mystery of number and of time
Is here displayed in characters of gold.
Transcribe each line composed by this machine,
Record the fleeting thoughts as they arise;
A line, once lost, may ne'er again be seen,
A thought, once flown, perhaps for ever flies.

"The *primum mobile* or first moving power of the machine, is a leaden weight of about 20 pounds [9kg], with an auxiliary weight of 10 pounds [4.5kg], applied to another part of the movement; these are occasionally wound up, and the velocity is regulated in the usual manner, by a worm [gear] and fly [wheel].

"The entire machine contains about 86 wheels, giving motion to cylinders, cranks, spirals, pulleys, levers, springs, ratchets, quadrants, tractors, snails, worm and fly, heart-wheels, eccentric-wheels, and star-wheels – all of which are of essential and effective motion, with various degrees of velocity, each performing its part in proper time and place. And in the front of the interior is a large Kaleidoscope, which regularly constructs a splendid geometric figure. This action is performed at the commencement of the operation, and at the precise time when the line of verse is conceived, previous to its mechanical composition."



LEFT: The Eureka.

Verses ex Machina

The machine's begetter clearly understood the value of lapel-grabbing techniques, with his dramatic pauses, spectacular visual effects, and musical mélange of patriotism and pop, albeit one visitor[1] found the device "without immediate utility", while it naturally prompted an immediate squib in *Punch* 9 (1845, p20), claiming that after its demonstration "Several double-barrelled Eurekas were ordered for Eton, Harrow, and Rugby."

Looking at the picture induces a conflation of Heath Robinson and the Wizard of Oz. There is a further full technical account, with illustrations, of the machine's workings by DW Blandford,[2] who likens it to an automatic vending machine. A contraption working by a combination of weights, pulleys, and gear wheels, requiring frequent windings-up like a grandfather clock, it might be seen as a cross between a primitive computer – its invention coincided with Babbage's steam-powered calculator 'Difference Engine Number One' – and a jukebox or one-armed bandit.

A cross between a primitive computer and a jukebox...

Its literary capacity was an impressive 26 million different Latin hexameters, at the previously mentioned Stakanhovite production rate of one a minute. As AS Gratwick remarks: "This was a more fun way to engage with versification because you got your hexameter one tantalising word at a time."[3]

In Blandford's words, most of the Eureka's verses were "solemn or prophetic, not to say trite", described by the machine's inscription as "Eternal Truths". The scansion is unvarying, the verb always a molossus (three long syllables), never an elision of end-vowels. Blandford thought that more metrical variety would have been produced if it had been programmed for the so-called 'Golden Line', while admitting that fewer words meant fewer permutations.

In its present state, the Eureka's capacity is much diminished. Blandford provides a list of words that can be formed from the six working drums. Apart from a trio of apparently non-existent ones, there are a couple of metrical errors.

The Eureka was the brainchild of Somerset native John Clark. Born in 1785 in Greinton, he attended school before living with an uncle in Glastonbury. He moved to Bridgwater where, after a spell of grocering, he became a printer, most notably publishing the first (1837) and final (1848) editions of his own *General History and Description of a Machine for Composing Latin Hexameter Verses* (still procurable according to Google).

BELOW: The machine's inventor, John Clark.

Blandford somewhat unfairly characterises Clark as "an eccentric genius". "Unbusinesslike" would better suit. When not mechanising Latin Verse, he invented a pneumatic mattress (a similar device is later parodied in Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*), the patent of which he unwisely sold to a cannier fellow who made a fortune by turning this into our familiar Macintosh raincoat. After the 1845 show, Clark retired to Bridgwater with his takings, dying there in 1853.

The Eureka then first went to Clark's nephew, Metford Thompson, who left a memorandum on it (reprinted in the June 1952 issue of the factory journal *Clarks Comment*), in which he likens the machine to a kaleidoscope, adding the intriguing claim that Clark's idea for it "was suggested by some papers connected with Glastonbury Abbey. It is certain that the machine was conceived at the Abbey by some of its former occupants."

Not the only Eureka mystery, as we shall see. It next migrated a couple of miles to Street, Somerset, home of cousins Cyrus and James Clark, founders (1825) of the still-thriving Clarks Shoe business. Aubrey Clark, elder son of Cyrus, had diverted himself with the machine, but after his death in 1890, it fell into disuse before being restored in 1950 by Charles Foster[4] of the Powers Samas Company, which made calculating machines, who deprecated Thompson's kaleidoscope comparison and any suggestion of 'miraculous powers'. After this, it was transferred to the Clarks Factory's Records Office.

But, before *FT* readers start organising charabanc tours to Street, I must point out that the Eureka machine is currently in temporary storage in the custody of the Alfred Gillett Trust, which is now responsible for the care of the heritage collections of the company and family. During spring 2012, the Trust will move into new accommodation in the Grange, Street. This will include a permanent home for the Latin verse machine, where it will be accessible to the public by prior appointment via the Trust for the first time in many years. The Trust is also currently collaborating with academics from the University of Exeter on a joint project to restore the machine to working order.

Eureka mysteries

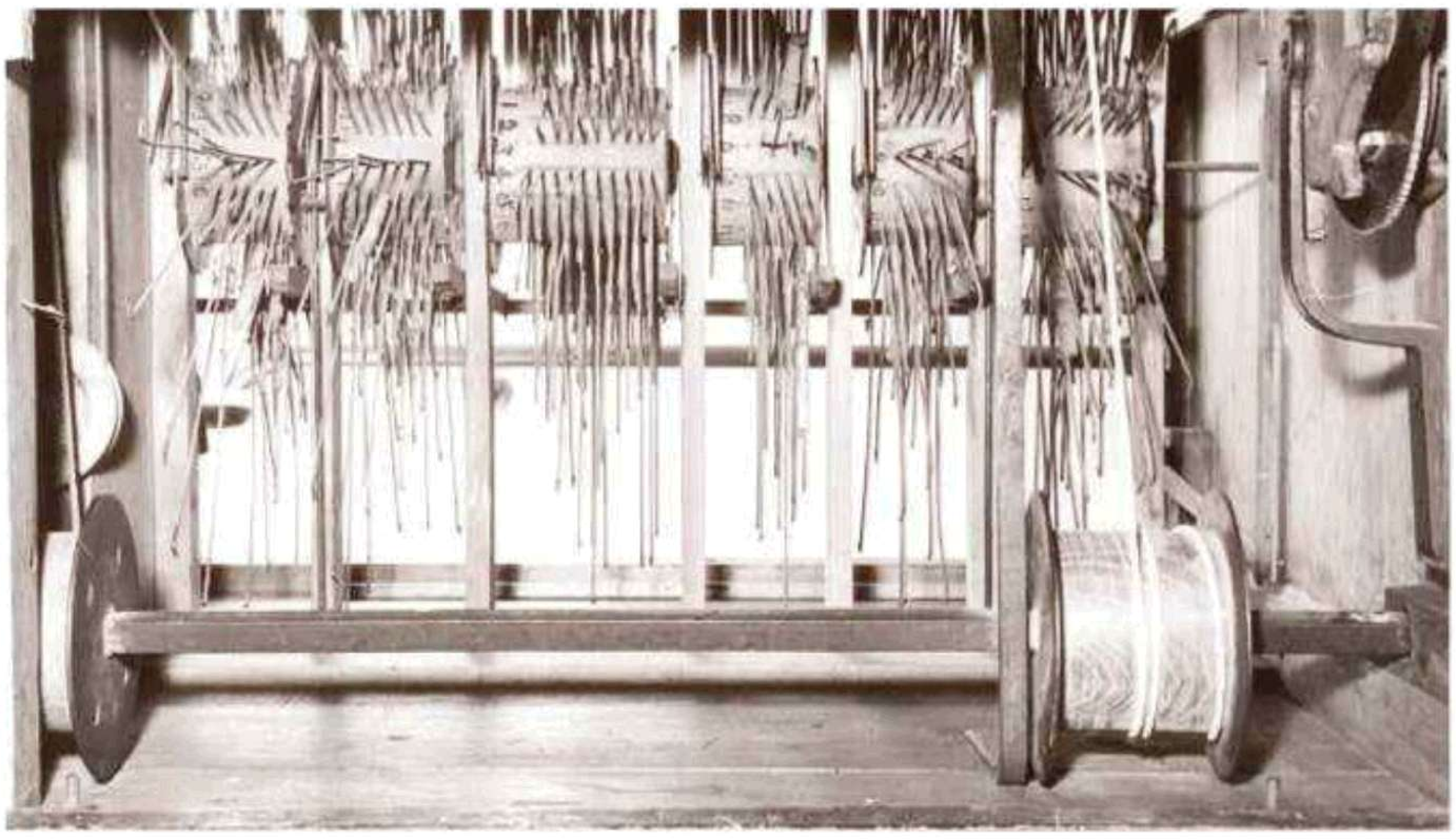
The Eureka's kaleidoscopic qualities provoke a possible and surprising new twist in the story. Namely, that it might have been the inspiration for Orwell's writing machine in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a device described as "a special kind of kaleidoscope known as a Versificator". Orwell could have remembered hearing about the Eureka (why else call his machine a Versificator, a very rare word in Latin and English?) from his Eton classics beak, Andrew Farrar Sydenham Gow (b1886), a Greek poetry specialist and the model for Porteous in *Coming Up For Air*. Orwell and Gow kept in later touch through letters and occasional visits, the latter culminating in Gow's appearance at Orwell's final hospital bed at the time of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s gestation. Orwell, who did well in school Latin and Greek, remembered titbits of exotic information later in life. For pertinent example, take this recollection of the Caliph Omar's alleged (the story has been doubted ever since Gibbon; cf. **FT185:18**) burning of the Alexandria Library in his *Tribune* "As I Please" column for 7 July 1944: "I remember that when I read about this as a boy it simply filled me with enthusiastic approval. It was so many words less to look up in the dictionary – that was how I saw it."

We may here see the planting of a seed that would blossom into Syme's rhapsodic account of the destruction of words in the Newspeak Dictionary's latest edition.

Now some more new Eureka mysteries and wrinkles, unremarked by Blandford and everyone else, thanks no doubt to their obscure and unexpected sources. They begin with Clark the inventor's great-niece Margaret Thompson Sturge, who records the following in her memoir:

"Father would take us to call on John Clark at his house in Eastover. He would show us the Latin Verse-making machine which he had invented, and let me put in a penny and see the couplet come out." [5]

This sets me humming Teresa Brewer's 1950 hit parade number "Put another nickle in / In the Nickelodeon / All I want is Lovin' you / And Music! Music! Music!" Penny-in-the-slot will also remind fellow-oldies of "spending a penny" in public conveniences. But, since there is no question that the Eureka was operated by a lever, this penny-dropping is either a childhood fantasy or some trick devised by Clark to entertain the little ones, whose interest in Latin verse was probably not great. And, one penny would not "buy" a couplet, since the machine disgorged one line at a time.



ABOVE: The inner workings of the Eureka.

The aforementioned issue of *Clarks Comments*, kindly supplied to me by Tim Crumplin of the firm's Museum, describes a planned episode of the BBC's Western region wireless programme *On The Air* featuring the Eureka. On hand as classics boffin was Mr A Saintsbury of Millfield School. In the trial run, Eureka produced the line *fervida sacra foris producunt verbera mira*, translatable as "fervid sacred performances out-of-doors produce wonderful blows", evoking Mr Saintsbury's immediate riposte: "The Salvation Army, of course."

This broadcast was obviously timed to coincide with the Eureka's repair by Charles Foster. How it turned out, I don't know; neither does Tim Crumplin. But, the biggest mystery looms. Cliff Michelmore,[6] who with Jean Metcalfe co-presented *Two-Way Family Favourites*, of hallowed memory, describes the following episode of the BBC television programme *Westward Ho!* in 1954 or 1955 (Cliff's chronology is a bit vague, but it can be narrowed down to one of these years):

"We brought into the studio an ancient machine which had recently been discovered in a house in Bath. The machine purported to turn out Latin hexameters at the pull of a lever. As the man demonstrated this literary computer, it started to come apart at the joints, but, undeterred, he kept pushing and pulling at its levers. Latin words dropped into window slots with a clank and a clutter. I was totally bemused by the whole affair. In the studio that evening were two young men who had just been taken on by the BBC as general trainees. One of them came across the studio floor to take a closer look. 'But that is not an hexameter, it has only five instead of six feet.' Now as one who does not know a Latin hexameter from an iambic pentameter, I was quick to profess my ignorance. Just as well, really, as the young BBC trainee was Alasdair Milne, now Director General of the BBC."

Milne began as trainee in September 1954, so the programme cannot have been before then. Questions tumble out like the Eureka's verses. What was the machine (Michelmore never calls it Eureka) doing in Bath, a city with which Clark and his descendants have no known connections, and not mentioned by Blandford and company in their accounts of Eureka's various lodgings? Who was the anonymous man demonstrating the machine? Why was it dilapidating so soon after Foster's repairs? Tim Crumplin tells me he can find no corroboration of this programme. Both it and the 1952 wireless one (of which Michelmore shows no awareness) were made under the BBC's West Country ægis. The account given above of the former makes no mention of Michelmore or Metcalfe as being involved: Desmond Hawkins was producer, Felix Felton writer.

Has Michelmore's memory played him false?

Or may we indulge in the ultimate fantasy of supposing the existence of a second, otherwise unattested mechanical verse-maker…? FT

NOTES

1 PA Nuttall in *Littell's Living Age* (1845), v7, p214. Various other contemporary accounts are quoted and analysed by EC Bensley: "Latin Hexameters by Machinery", *Notes & Queries* (1 April 1911), series2 no3, pp249–50.

2 "The Eureka", in *Greece & Rome*, March 1963, v10, pp71–8.

3 "The Latin Hexameter", in *Classical Review* (1990), v40, p341.

4 Foster left an unpublished 8-page memorandum, "Notes on the Mechanical Construction for Composing Hexameter Latin Verse," (dated 8 Mar 1951). For information on this, I am grateful to Prof. Brian Randell, editor of *The Origins of Digital Computers*, Springer-Verlag, 3rd ed. 1982, which includes Eureka allusions and bibliography. See also R Clark: "Barbara Froena Domi Promittunt Foedera Mala", in (ed. P Lovell) *Somerset Anthology*, Sessions 1975, pp96–102. The title is a Eureka verse whose last word contains a metrical error.

5 *Memories and Echoes of Bygone Days* (1904), here quoted from *Clarks Comments* (June 1952).

6 *Two-Way Story*, Hamish Hamilton, 1986; pb Futura 1987, p151.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

BARRY BALDWIN is a classicist, journalist and author of mystery fiction. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and Emeritus Professor of Classics at the University of Calgary, best known ifor his work on early Greek humorists and satirists. He is a regular *FT* columnist.

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113. Texas blue dogs

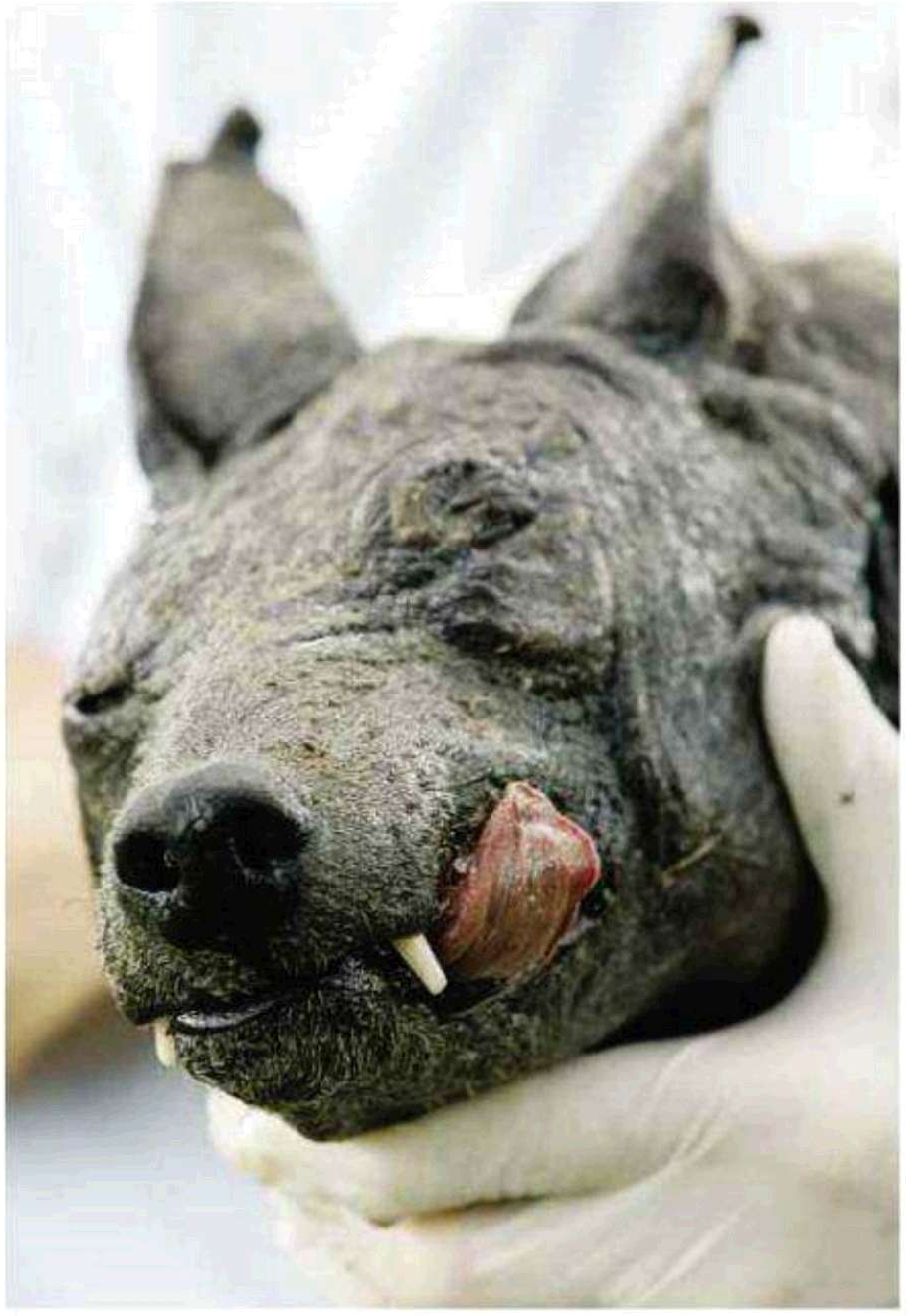
JON DOWNES travelled to the Lone Star State to solve a canine cryptozoological mystery.

My search for the blue dogs of Texas began in November 2004, when I visited a farm in Elmendorf, just south of San Antonio, where local rancher Devin McAnally had shot a hairless, blue-skinned canid in July that year (see **FT199:48–49**).[1] He took photographs of it to a local convenience store where one of the customers said that it looked just like "the chupacabra that her grandmother had told her about when she was a girl".

Thus was born the legend of the Texas chupacabra. I took one look at the bones of the unfortunate creature and was convinced that it was nothing of the sort. Meanwhile, the Elmendorf beast was discussed widely across the Internet and dismissed as a coyote with mange. Well, I was pretty sure that this couldn't possibly be the answer either, and over the next six years I studied the matter from afar and hoped that I would eventually get back to Texas to investigate in person.

In the spring of 2009 – thanks to the generosity of Richie and Naomi West – Corinna and I returned to Texas and became involved in the hunt for the blue dogs, as what started as a holiday became a full-scale investigation. Richie and Naomi had already visited Blanco, Texas, where another specimen was languishing in the deep freeze belonging to a local student taxidermist. He took a number of tissue samples, which were sent off for DNA analysis. The results have since come back from the Davis Labs, California: it was a coyote cross; although what it was crossed with proved impossible to isolate.

Our first port of call was a small town some miles north of Houston where a lady I shall call 'Denise' lived in a suburban house with her young son and elderly mother. The house backed on to an area of wilderness owned by the local electricity company. Some 40 miles (65km) long and a mile (1.6km) across, this strip of wilderness contained a rich and diverse population of animal life. Richie and Naomi had set up security cameras which picked up foxes, raccoons, deer, possums – and on one occasion a very peculiar-looking canid.



PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES / AP / ERIC GAY

JONATHAN DOWNES

TOP: Phyllis Canion holds the head of one of her two blue dog specimens.

ABOVE: The den at the Kayek ranch.

Denise had been watching these strange dog-like creatures – almost completely hairless in the summer and with a thin coat of down in the winter – for about six months, and had filmed and photographed them. One of the problems with the Elmendorf creature being a coyote was that if the animal had been so riddled with sarcoptic mange that it was completely hairless, it would have been hardly able to walk, let alone kill chickens, eat mulberries and wag its tail. Denise's creatures were apparently able to procreate and appeared to breed true. The video footage we have of them shows them walking with a peculiar hump-backed gait, eating food off the forest floor and appearing perfectly healthy. Eyewitnesses even reported them cocking their legs and scenting trees like normal dogs.

But what were they? They had only moved into the area within the past six months and – according to Denise – the population of rabbits, opossums and other small creatures had diminished rapidly, while a local semi-tame coyote appeared to be very scared of these new arrivals. The family's own dogs, however, seemed eager to make friends and I have footage which appears to show them and a naked blue/grey dog sniffing at each through a chain link fence.

Our journey then took us west to Fayetteville where, at the Hayek family ranch, we met Harvey and his son Deric. For some years, they had been seeing strange beasts living in several locations on their ranch. Once they had even found roadkill which had been sent to the local university, which was unable to identify it. Once again, the description was of blue/grey, hairless, dog-like creatures larger than the largest coyote, with long muzzles and hunched backs. The Hayeks took us to a remote part of their ranch where, in the sandy walls of a desolate gulch, there was a series of large holes that led deep into the sandy cliff-face. These were, or at least had been, the lair of a family of these creatures, they explained. They had seen them on a number of occasions, including a large specimen which went into a hole and came out again facing the other way; which implies that inside was an area big enough for it to have turned around.

The Hayeks had once been the proud owners of a large and fruitful orchard of pecan trees. In recent years, though, they had seen their legacy being slowly but surely destroyed as trees withered and died and even apparently healthy trees produced few or no nuts. They blamed this upon SO_2 from a local coal-fuelled power station. Could it be, they wondered, that these silent but deadly emissions had somehow caused an unknown mutation in one of the canids living in the area and produced these strange bald blue/grey dogs?

We had no answers, and headed on to Cuero to meet Dr Phyllis Canion.

Dr Canion, who has lived in Africa and has been a hunter all her life, was obviously the lady of the manor. we met her at a genteel little country club which she traversed like a ship in full sail (I dubbed her 'the Grand Canion' in my own personal rolladex). She had appeared on a National Geographic documentary about the Texas blue dogs. In 2007, she had come across no less than four specimens – all male, all identical, and all road kills. Through misadventures, two of them had fallen by the wayside, but she had preserved the remaining two carcasses.

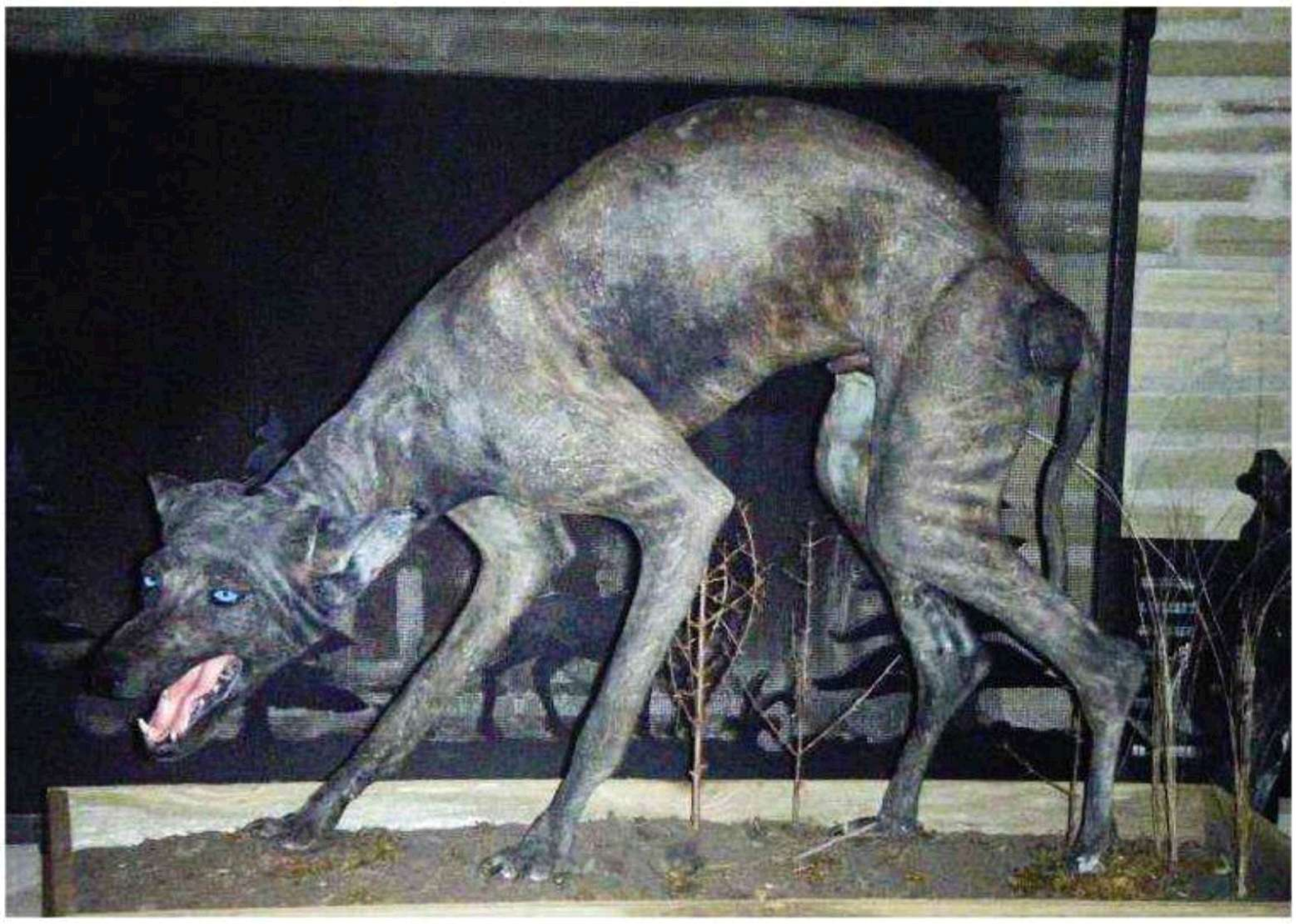
The National Geographic documentary had likened the Cuero blue dogs to the late, lamented thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*) and had even described – alongside a single pair of nipples – "pouches" on their back legs. We had interpreted this as suggesting that the mysterious blue dogs were marsupials. Over an excellent dinner, I tried to draw out Dr Canion on the subject, but no matter how many conversational gambits I tried, she seemed determined to ignore the topic of the Texas blue dogs, and instead talked (eloquently and entertainingly) of everything and anything else. Despite eating the best meal I'd ever been presented with in the New World, my frustration was mounting.

When we finally arrived at Dr Canion's ranch, all was revealed. For there, in her fireplace, was a stuffed and mounted Texas blue dog. She burst out laughing. "I wanted y'all to see this for yourselves, and to see your faces," she said.

But was it a marsupial? Could it be, as some Internet pundits had suggested, a peculiar example of convergent evolution? A New World thylacine analogue that had evolved from the carnivorous opossums of North and South America?

No, of course not.

The first thing I did was to have a look at the much-vaunted pouches. Now I'd assumed these to be those marsupial trademarks – protective membranes under which the semi-developed ur-fœtus (which is ejected unceremoniously from its mother's birth canal long before it is able to face the rigours of the outside world) can fully develop. But, they were nothing of the sort. When Dr Canion and others referred to "pouches", they were referring to things that looked like bulging packets of meat, roughly the shape and size of a large scone, positioned on the haunches of the animal, roughly where its buttocks would be, if it had buttocks (which it doesn't). My immediate thought was that these were anal glands. However, Dr Canion insisted that they were flesh, and not glands of any sort.



ABOVE: The blue dog stuffed and mounted in Dr Phyllis Canion's fireplace.

JONATHAN DOWNES

All the blue dogs stood in a hunch-back position

It was a remarkable creature, and apart from the "pouches", it had four other notable features.

1. It was almost completely hairless, and while there were hair follicles on the skin they were few and far between. Dr Canion insisted – and I see no reason to disbelieve her – that she investigated the hair follicles of the recently dead creature and found them to be perfectly healthy.

2. Like Hitler, and my dog Biggles, the specimen was apparently monorchid.

3. The eyes were a remarkable pale blue. I would have taken exception to this, and assumed that it was the result of incompetent taxidermy, but Dr Canion showed me a photograph which proved that this was exactly the same as the eye colour in the recently dead animal.

4. It was mounted in a peculiar hunch-backed position. I queried this with Dr Canion, and she confirmed to me that when she has seen the specimens of these animals alive, they have stood in this very manner.

We recorded several hours' worth of interviews with Dr Canion, and that night as we drove back to our hotel we asked ourselves the obvious question: What the bloody hell *were* these blue dogs?

It is certain (and – unusually for a cryptozoological case – I *can* say certain) that not all of the blue dogs were of the same species. Genetic material from the Elmendorf creature was tested at two laboratories: one in New York and one in Copenhagen. Both tests proved conclusively that this animal was a domestic dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*). However, five different tests on the Cuero creature all identified it as a cross between a coyote (*C.latrans*) and a Mexican wolf (*C.lupus baileyi*).

And herein lies the problem.

Although the Mexican wolf was once found in Texas, its range *never* included Cuero or the other areas we had been investigating. But although *C.lupus baileyi* was never – as far as we know – found in this part of the Lone Star State, the Texas grey wolf (with the monumentally fortean Latin name of *C.lupus monstrabilis*) was once known across this part of the state. However, according to accepted wisdom, the last Texas grey wolf was shot in 1942. Another sub-species, the buffalo wolf (*C.lupus mubilis*) once followed the bison herds across the state's plains, including central and southern Texas, although the last of these was shot in 1926. And this is where it gets complicated.

A few years ago, wolf taxonomy was revised and 12 of the original sub-species which occurred in the western United States and central Canada were re-classified as *C.lupus mubilis*: so, according to some taxonomists, the buffalo wolf still exists, although everyone agrees that it no longer exists in Texas.

The status of the Mexican wolf is also on shaky ground. The last two Texan specimens were both shot in 1970, and in a rare display of co-operation between the American and Mexican governments, the last five wild

MERRILY HARPUR

Mexican wolves were captured in 1980 and used to start a breeding project. Several hundred have been bred in captivity, although from an extremely limited gene pool, and 100 were liberated in southern Arizona. However, by the time we were in southern Texas only 42 were left – and they were over 1,000 miles (1,600km) from Cuero. It seems highly unlikely that a wandering male from this population could have sired the Cuero creatures.

There are suggestions that a relic population of *baileyi* still exists in the Sierra Madre, and during our sojourn in Texas we discovered a surprisingly large number of anecdotal accounts of wild wolves in several locations around the state. At the very least, this would suggest that either a small pocket of *baileyi* still exists in the wild, or that *monstrabilis* in fact managed to evade extinction. Even if these animals turn out to be surviving *nubilis*, the existence of living genetic material from the buffalo wolf could well cause the taxonomic revisions of a few years ago to be looked at again.

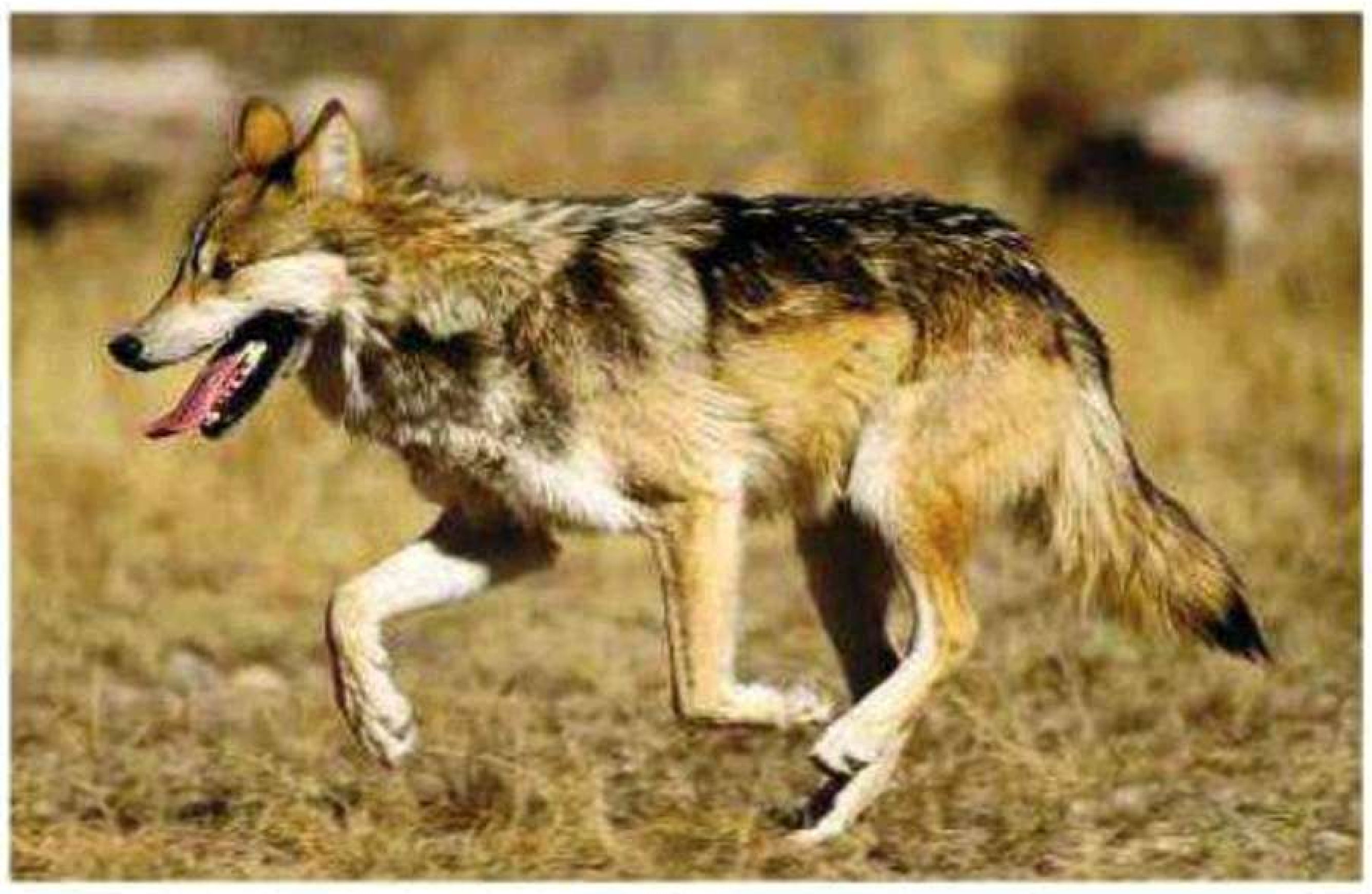
But it gets even more confusing. Because – depending on whom you believe – there is a second species of wolf in Texas. The red wolf (*C.rufus*) was supposed to be extinct in the wild, but our friend and colleague Chester Moore Jnr rediscovered them in the late 1990s by using camera traps set in his native Orange County. But is the red wolf a separate species? Well, once again, it depends...

It was Naomi who first noticed that several of the photographs of dead blue dogs from across southern Texas collected by our friend and colleague Ken Gerhard show the creatures exhibiting the "pouches" that are such a singular feature of the mounted Cuero specimen. Indeed, when you look hard enough, even some of the animals filmed and photographed by Denise show these peculiar characteristics on their nether regions. However, others do not. All the animals that have the "pouches" appear to be male. Could this be an example of sexual dimorphism? Or are the animals without "pouches" something else entirely?

The 2004 Elmendorf beast had no "pouches". But it was a female. The DNA tests revealed it as a domestic dog, and without access to a complex reference library of genetic material it is very difficult and expensive to go any further in investigating what domesticated type could have been the progenitor of this unfortunate creature. It appears that at the time of Columbus there were a large number of native American hairless dog breeds, a small number of which have survived to the present day. Is it possible that one of the supposedly extinct breeds has resurfaced due to its genetic legacy surviving unsuspected in the feral dog population of the Elmendorf region? Yes, quite possibly.

Ken Gerhard and Naomi West, both together and separately, have done a remarkable job in collecting several dozen photographs of blue dogs, mostly dead. I agree with Ken that a large proportion of these (as well as several of the so-called Texas chupacabra videos on the Internet) are of nothing more than very ill and mangy dogs or coyotes. However, as you have seen, a small proportion – including those secured by Dr Canion and those filmed on Denise's property – are, I believe, something of more importance.

JONATHAN DOWNES



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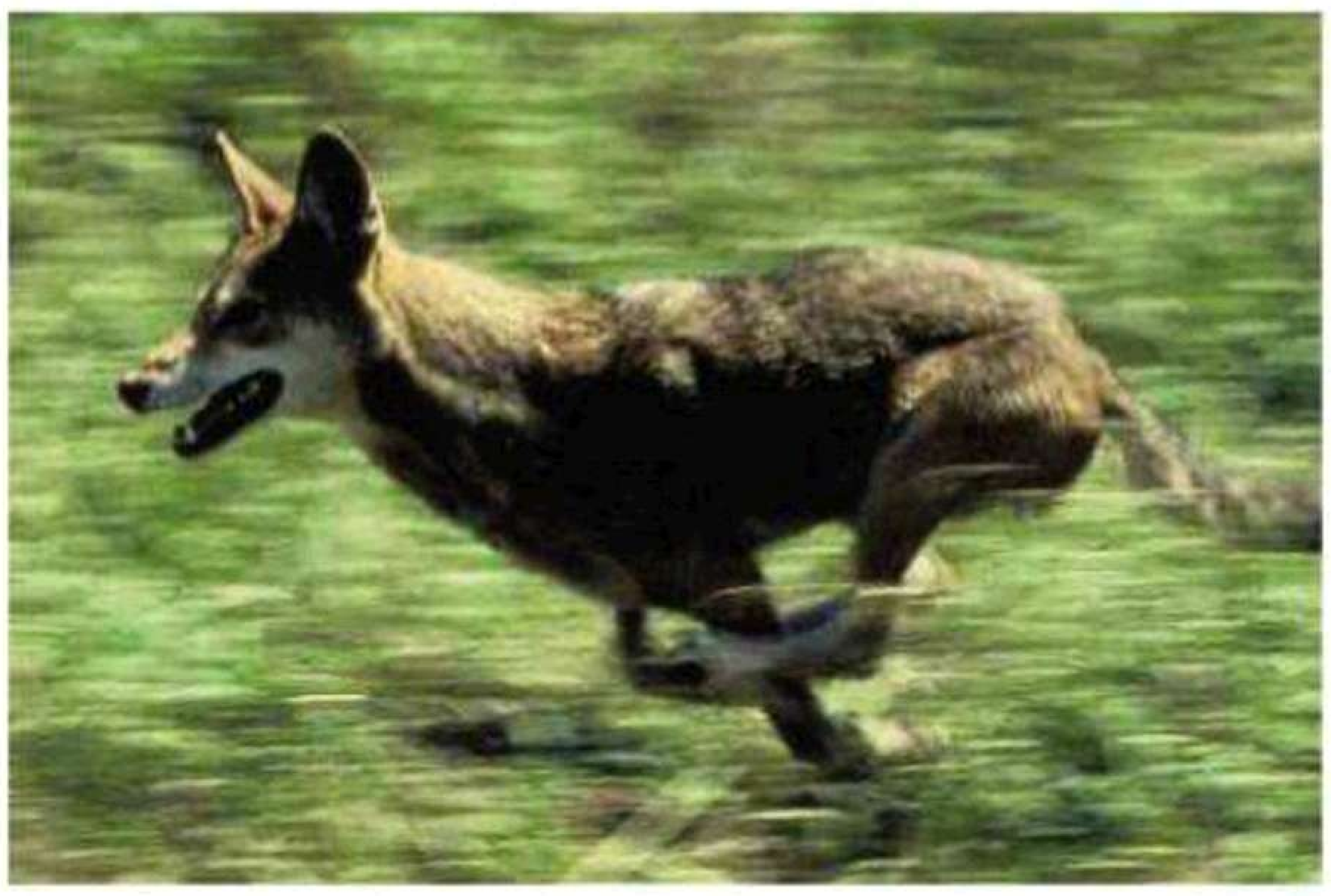

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TOP: In wait for the blue dog at the back of Denise's house (the gun is a tranquiliser dart gun) .

CENTRE: Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*).

ABOVE: Red wolf (*C.rufus*).

From the available evidence, they show – at the very least – that wolves are not entirely extinct in Texas, and we hypothesise that the discovery of these wolves may have enormous implications for the survival of the rarest sub-species. The Elmendorf creature is something else entirely. Whether or not it is a surviving member of the pre-Columbian domestic races of dog we may never know.

We are still awaiting the results of the DNA tests on the genetic material taken from the 'Blanco beast' but would make an educated guess that it will prove to be the same as Dr Canion's specimen, and that the morphological peculiarities of both beasts are similar enough to suggest that the differences are purely sexually dimorphic. We are awaiting these results, and any to come from the Fayetteville creatures now or at any time in the future, with interest. Here we should probably make brief mention of the creature filmed by a police car in DeWitt County, a figurative stone's throw from Cuero. This did not appear to have the buttock "pouches", but had a peculiarly elongated muzzle and appeared to have the hunched back of the Cuero and Blanco beasts (as did Denise's animals). We would hazard a guess that the DeWitt creature was probably a female, as it was far too energetic and exuberant to be merely a diseased mutt or coyote. **FT**

NOTES

1 See also Jon Downes: *The Island of Paradise*, CFZ, 2007.

JONATHAN DOWNES is director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology and a frequent *FT* contributor. He lives in Devon with his wife and an ever-shifting population of reptiles.

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FORTEANA AND THE JEWISH SHAMAN-PROPHETS

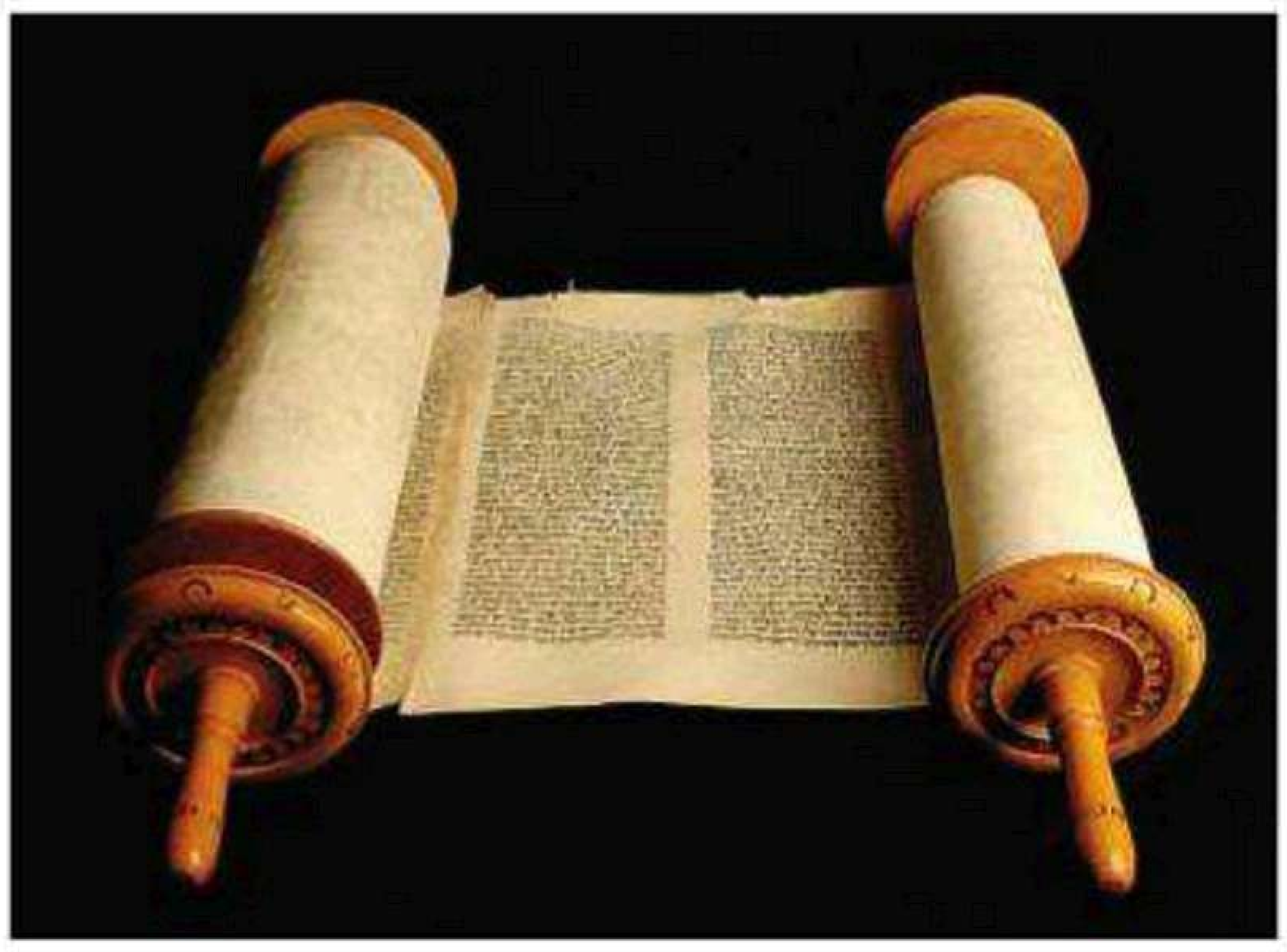
The books known to Christians as the Old Testament derive from the Hebrew Bible, or Tanakh, and are a rich source of stories of signs and wonders. From his study of the primary texts, RICHARD SEARY reveals the extent of fortean references in the ancient Hebrew scriptures, knowledge of which was suppressed by various translators.

There are a prodigious number of fortean phenomena in the Hebrew Bible; probably every known type of phenomenon gets a mention at some point and nobody really knows how old some of these scriptures are. In the Book of Job, for example, there is a seemingly accurate description of living dinosaurs, one of which reads like a type of stegosaurus: "his back is like rows of shields". Another reminds one of classic fire-breathing dragons (Job 40–41).

Apart from the theophanies of the creation stories in Genesis, which introduce angels and cherubim, sea-monsters, the serpent and the Tree of Life (Genesis 1–3), we are led to the Nephilim – evil, lusty giants – and 'Arkeology' (Genesis 6–8). The Hebrew term translated in the sentence "the Ark drifted upon the *surface of the waters*" is the same as for the 'waters of the sky': ie, the Milky Way. The Hebrew text implies that the Ark floated above the Earth among the stars. Was it a kind of space ship? The Noah stories suggest that perhaps Earth was not humanity's original planet.

Dreams and dream-symbolism come to the fore in the story of Jacob's Ladder (Genesis 28:10–22) and the Joseph stories. Shamanism is detected in the 'sacred schemes' and '*dudaim*' incidents (Genesis 30:7–21), which Jewish sages regard as the most cryptic of all passages. No one knows for sure what '*dudaim*' is; a mandrake plant, or something like 'mojo' perhaps. Sympathetic magic is the core of the story of Laban's sheep (Genesis 30:31–43, and 31:8–13), in which the colours of de-barked poplar, hazel and chestnut rods caused the ewes which saw them to have speckled and spotted lambs. The text says the flocks "became stimulated by the rods".

FACING PAGE: GETTY IMAGES / HLTON ARCHIVE / RISCHGITZ (FROM AN ORIGINAL BY GUSTAVE DORE)



ABOVE: The Torah scrolls as used in synagogues. **FACING PAGE:** Aaron turns his staff into a snake.

Exodus brings a magical mystery tour, the 40-year pilgrimage to the Promised Land. Now we find the 'cold fire' of the burning bush and the Ineffable Name of the Deity (Exodus 3). Magic staffs or wands with metamorphic properties are used by Moses and Aaron throughout the Exodus saga. Signs and wonders abound, including spiritual healing and divinely-inflicted diseases. The necromancers of Egypt (Exodus 7:11) were easily defeated by Aaron's staff, which transformed into a serpent to consume the Egyptian magicians' snake-staffs (pictured opposite).

The 10 Plagues were a war between Egyptian gods and the God of Israel, though there have been attempts in recent times to attribute them to natural phenomena. Each plague had a spiritual meaning and wasn't just a demonstration of control over nature; though each plague is a fortean phenomenon in its own right:

1) Water-to-blood transformation;
2) Huge swarms of frogs;
3) Severe lice-infestation
4) A swarm (lit. 'mixture') of wild beasts;
5) An epidemic on all Egyptian domestic animals;
6) Soot thrown into the air causing boils on the Egyptians;
7) Weird weather: giant hail, thunder and fire from the sky;
8) A gigantic locust swarm which covered every inch of ground within Egypt's borders;
9) Darkness during the day and more intense at night – this 'darkness' was far more than absence of light, the text calls it 'tangible'; it was 'dark matter' which sealed and immobilised (Exodus 10:21–23), and
10) The death of the first-born.

An eleventh oddity: all faithful Israelites were unaffected by the plagues.

Exodus also introduces the Sacred Calendar (Exodus ch.12) still in use among Jews today, and the prophetess, a woman of power who uses music, drums and dance (Exodus 15:20). Then we have manna, food from Heaven (Exodus ch.16), "the food which sustains the angels" (*Akiva*) that "was so sublime that all of it was absorbed into the body without producing any body waste" (Talmud: *Yoma* 75b); and a fall of birds to sustain the people. Divine auditory manifestations (sounding like *shofar*, trumpet blasts), as well as thunder, lightning, smoke and fire settle on Mt Sinai, setting the scene for the giving of the Law (Exodus 19:16–24). Next we have the theophanies of the 'pillar of smoke by day' and 'fire by night', the modern interpretation being the distant volcanic eruption of

Thera. Do we have a case of transformation alchemy when Aaron "throws gold into the fire and out comes a [golden] calf" (Exodus 32:24)?

There could be a reference to spontaneous human combustion in the deaths of Aaron's sons (Levit. 10:2). Curses are found at numerous places; especially the only known, complete, late Bronze Age (c.1500–1200 BCE) trial by ordeal curse – 'The Ordeal of Bitter Waters' – to determine if a woman had committed adultery (Numbers. 5:11–31). Before feminists attack, there is also an ordeal to check if a man has acted treacherously toward his wife. His dangly bits will shrivel and fall off – a no-win situation all round. This curse still does the rounds (see 'vanishing penises' in various *FT*s).

Then we see the Earth as entity, wherein it split open, swallowed a rebellious group then re-closed leaving no trace of them; and fire from Heaven (Numbers. 16:31–35). Sanctified objects were those touched by the heavenly fire. Miraculous sprouting from 'dead' wood and overnight ripening of almond buds as a sign of Divine Authority are found (Numbers 17:16–26). A mystical rock, from which water was made to flow, and a curse attached to Moses and Aaron for 'overdoing' the ritual of the rock (Numbers 20:1–13), is called by sages "a great secret of the mysteries of the Torah" (Rambam). An unnoticed, in translation, reference to a mystical mountain – 'Mt Hor' actually means 'mountain of mountain' / 'hill on hill' – and many supernatural and mystical events are connected with it. It's where Aaron, the first High Priest, dies (Numbers 20:22; et al).

When 'King' Og is mentioned (Numbers 21:33; 32:33; Deut. 1, 3, 4, 29, 31; Josh. 2, 9, 12, 13; 1Kings 4:19; Neh. 9:22; et al), don't think human king – think Jabba the Hutt, a monster. 'Og' means 'round', 'bowl-like'. Deuteronomy 3:11 says "only Og, king of the Bashan, was left of the remaining *Rephaim*" – a race of 'ghost-like' (in that they moved silently) giants. The etymology of '*rephaim*' is really interesting. Og's 'bed' was nine cubits (c.13ft 6in or 4m) by four (6ft or 1.8m) and made of iron, a rare and valuable metal in the Bronze Age. According to Rashi, Og's cubit was many times longer than a human cubit. The word *eres* – translated 'bed', 'bed-stead' or 'cradle' – would be better translated as 'cage' or 'holding pen'. It comes from a root meaning 'arch' / 'canopy' / 'surround'. It is not the normal word for bed and is found only once, here, in the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Rules for dealing with prophets or dreamers producing signs or wonders are found at Deuteronomy 13, and have given rise to two rabbinical opinions. Rashi says "a *sign* is a supernatural event in Heaven, a *wonder* is a miraculous event on Earth;" while Rambam defines them differently: "a *sign* is a miracle that the prophet foretells, a *wonder* is one that he performs spontaneously." There is a list of forbidden praxis: child sacrifice or 'given to demons', divination, astrology, soothsaying, augury, cloud-reading, sorcery, animal charming, consulting Ov or Yidoni, necromancy and consulting the dead (Deut. 18:10–14), along with the penalties for doing so.

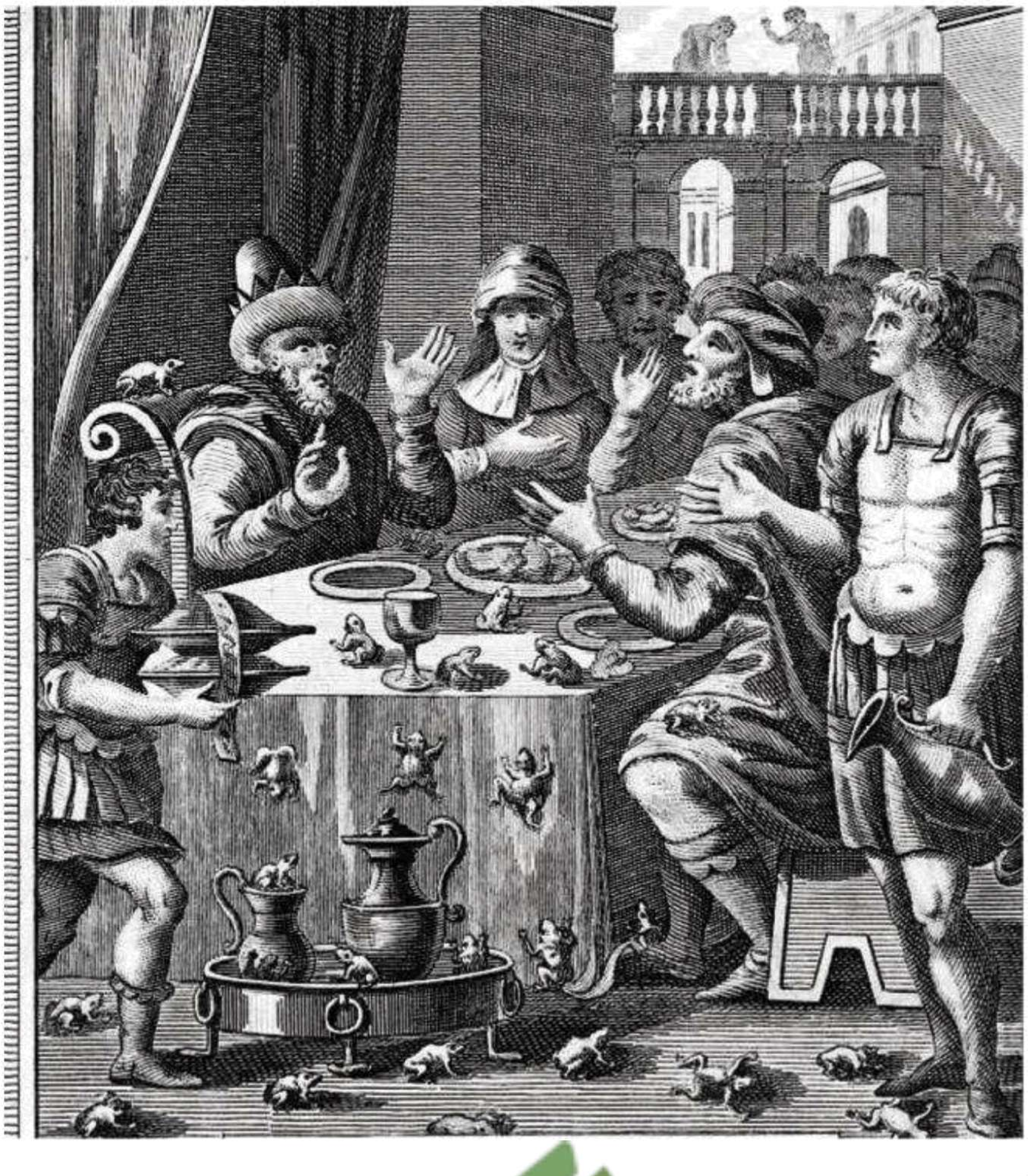
Curses and blessings are dealt with in detail (Deut. 27:14–28:46), and there's an odd little verse on indestructible clothes and shoes (Deut. 29:4). There's a (unintentional?) mention of space travel (Deut. 30:4) and the first mention of Sheol or Hell (Deut. 32:22). Battles of flaming demons and the noontime demon are in the Hebrew Jewish translation (Deut. 32:24), but the non-Jewish Greek translation gives 'teeth of wild beast' and 'venom of creeping things'. These are part of The Song of Moses (Deut. 32–44) a particularly fearful text. I dealt with the strangeness surrounding the death of Moses in my previous article (i.e. the linguistic conundrum in the Hebrew text that implies that he 'buried himself' – see **FT279:42**). That ends the *Torah*, but forteana continue unabated through the next two sections, *Prophets* (*Nabi*) and *Writings* (*Khatubim*).

SHAMANS, PROPHETS AND WILDMEN

A stone circle is made in the middle of a dry riverbed when the Ark of the Covenant causes a dry path through the River Jordan. I think this is the first mention of the practice of making stone circles to mark a holy or important place (Josh. 4:4–24). The text indicates that the stones were relocated from the river to a place Joshua named Gilgal, which means 'rolling' / 'wheel' / 'stone-circle', near the river and close to Jericho.

In the story of the fall of Jericho there is a curious 7x7x7x7 cycle formula; seven priests carry seven *shofars* (rams' horn trumpets) and encircle the walled city seven times blowing the trumpets for seven days. The trumpeters then blow a long blast on the seventh day, give a mighty shout and the walls come tumbling down: a mighty aural miracle? Recently, a spoilsport Israeli archæologist, I can't recall his name, pointed out that in siege warfare it was normal for besiegers to be noisy to muffle the sounds of sappers tunnelling under the walls. As the foundations were undermined they were propped up by timbers. When enough wall was undermined the supporting timbers were torched or pulled away. The foundations collapsed 'and the walls came tumbling down'. This technique was used as recently as WW1. However, no evidence of wall destruction has been found at Jericho, the world's oldest walled town, dating from the Neolithic period (8th millennium BCE).

The taking or using material from the conquered city was banned. All booty was dedicated to God and not used for ordinary purposes as it was cursed (Josh. 6:24). A taboo-breaker was discovered through a permitted divine divination using the gemstones on the High Priest's breastplate (Josh. 7:14). 'Huge stones from Heaven' helped the Israelites to victory over a five-king confederation, then 'the Sun stood still' and 'the Moon stopped'. Anakim – a family or



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LEFT: Frogs – one of the ten plagues which overwhelmed the Egyptians.

race of giants – was destroyed in Israel by Joshua but they remained in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod, Philistine cities on the coast (Josh. 11:21–22).

With the Book of Judges, we begin to come into the historical era and personalities strongly associated with fortean phenomena take centre-stage. Prophets and prophetesses now become more clearly shamans. Deborah – her name is onomatopœic and means '[queen] bee' – is the first 'judge' to be named as a prophet. All English translations call her 'wife of Lappidoth' (Judges 4:4), which doesn't give the true meaning; the Hebrew '*eshet lapidate*' actually means 'fire woman'.

Deborah's Song (Josh. 5) may be the earliest, complete shamanic invocation from the late Bronze or early Iron Age. In Hebrew, it's a poem. As Deborah sets forth rapturously, even the forces of nature joined Israel in battle. "*From heaven they fought, the very stars from their orbits did battle.*" (Josh. 5:20) An interstellar war?

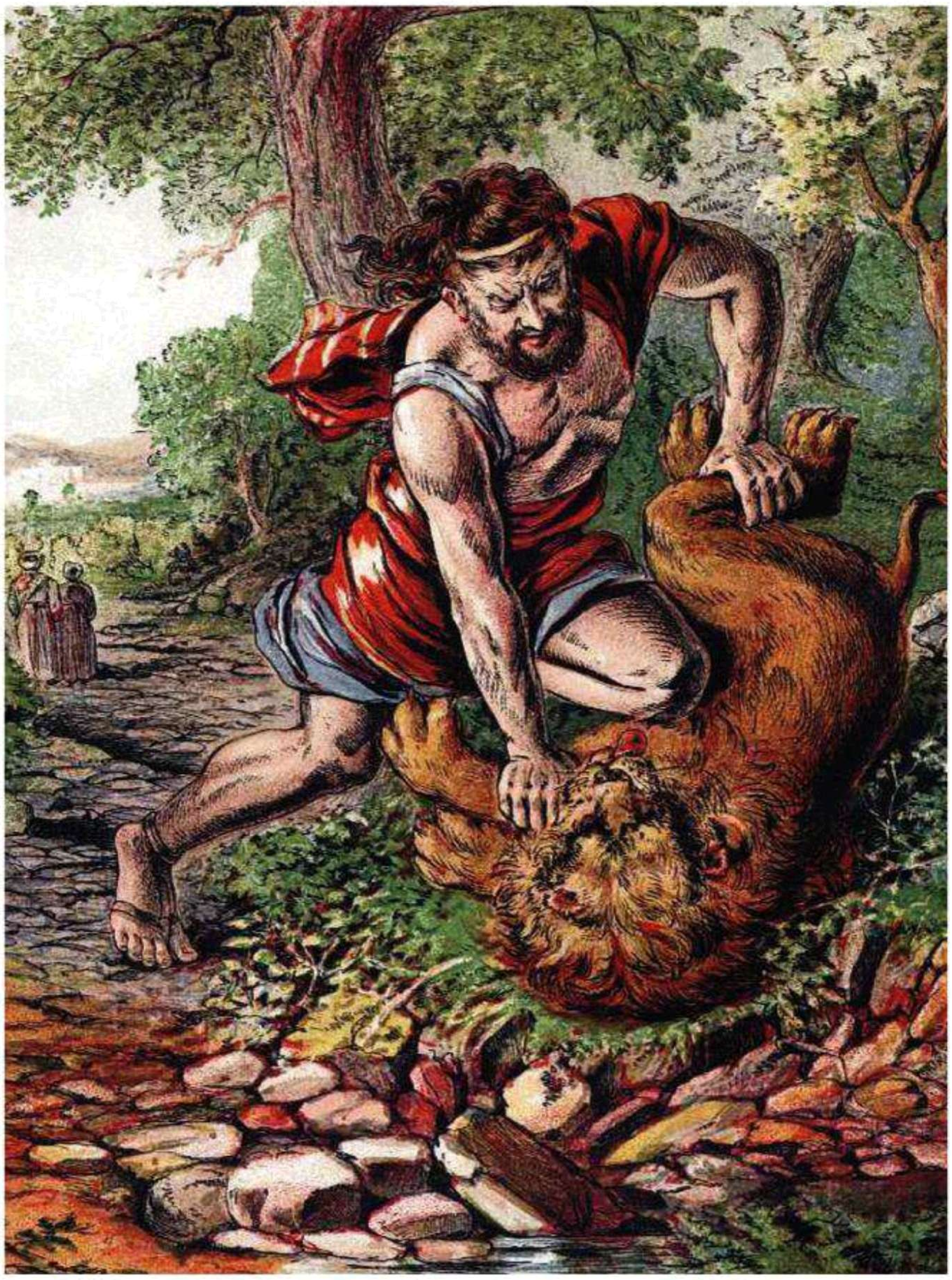
We see fire from a rock after it was touched by the staff (wand) of 'The Angel of God' (Josh. 6:21); divination by wool fleece (Josh. 6:36–38); and symbolic dreams (Josh. 7:13–14) confirm Gideon as chosen to defeat and drive off the Midians. 'Gideon' isn't a proper name, it means 'destroyer / warrior', and '*midian*' means 'brawling / contentious'.

The story of Samson is a classic. His name means 'Sunlight/Sun's rays'. From birth, he is dedicated as a Nazirite ('separated one'), a special order of shaman-prophets. Forget Victorian imagery of a muscle-bound Samson, with his neat golden locks and trim beard, holding a lion's jaws open; rather see very long dreadlocks. In Samson's case, his seven dreadlocks were the source of his strength (Josh. 16:13); he also had a matted beard. Nazirite vows meant no cutting, trimming or grooming of body hair. Nor did Nazirites ever wash, so he must have smelled. Although he was a 'judge' (ruler) of Israel, he lived in a cave (Josh. 15:8) – "*the cave in the rock of Etam*" (lit. 'cave of the bird of prey').

Samson was a wildman, not a leader of armies but a lone vigilante endowed with, at times, superhuman strength. The 'jawbone of an ass', with which he 'struck down' a thousand people, could refer to a double-headed poleaxe named for its shape and size, a formidable weapon in the hands of a strong, skilled Bronze Age warrior. He was also a womaniser and it was to a woman that he revealed his source of strength, and this was his downfall.

The next major character is Samuel – his name means 'requested of God' – another Nazirite from birth, but so different from Samson. He was born of a barren woman (a familiar motif of Divine intervention) who was herself a prophetess, Hannah. A little aside (Samuel 3:1) declares that "*GOD speaking was rare in those days, visions were uncommon.*"

The Holy Ark is captured by the Philistines and placed as a trophy in the Temple of Dagon, a merman god with fish body, human head and arms. Next morning, their merman idol is found face down on the ground in front of the Ark. It's re-erected. Next morning, the idol is found with its head and hands severed, but the fish trunk is still in place on its stand. This worries the Ashdodites so much that they have the Ark sent to another Philistine city, Gath. The Gathians panic when struck with hæmorrhoids – literally 'swellings'/'tumours', but traditionally 'hæmorrhoids' – so the Ark is sent on its way to another city, Ekron. Death struck Ekron and those who didn't die were also afflicted with hæmorrhoids and a plague of mice or rats ravaged the Philistine country: an early reference to the Black Death?



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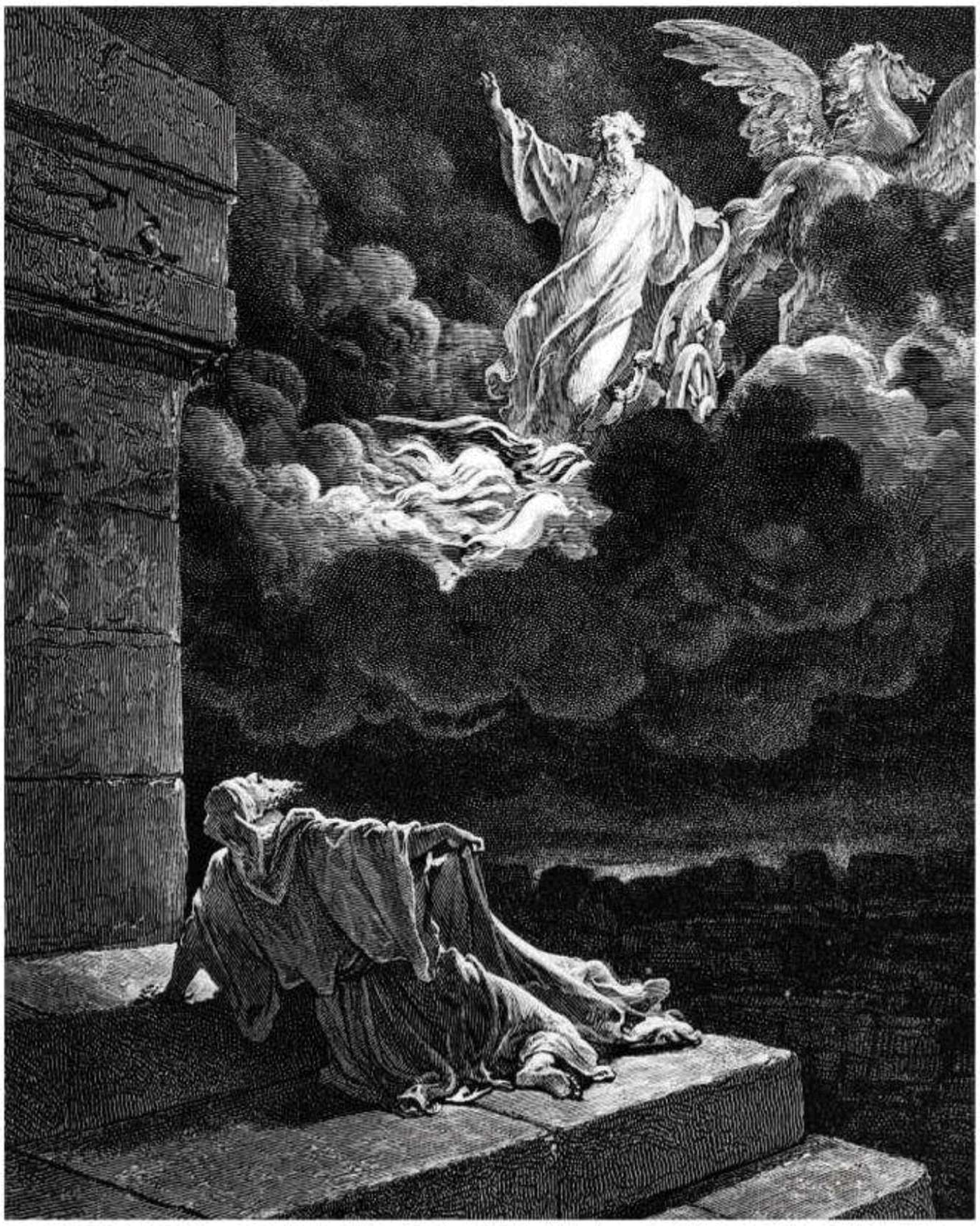
ABOVE: Samson despatches a lion; easy for a man who slew a thousand men with a jawbone.

SAMSON WAS A WILDMAN WITH SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH

Using a mystical test (Samuel 6:8–12), the Philistines send the Ark back to the Israelites along with five golden images of hæmorrhoids and five golden images of mice – one for each of the five affected cities – as a guilt-offering to appease the Israelite God; a form of sympathetic magic. The word plays here are important; the names of the cities, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron mean 'ravager', 'crusher', and 'exterminator' respectively. The story includes a natural megalith – called 'The Great Mourning [Stone]' – where the Israelites placed the Ark and offered sacrifices for its safe return (Samuel 6:14–19). Another megalith is erected by Samuel at a site – Mizpah – where the Philistines are routed by a great thunderstorm. The stone is called 'Ebenezer' meaning 'stone [of] help' (Samuel 7:12). One wonders if the ancient Britons named *their* megaliths and henges?

There's an often overlooked little verse (Samuel 9:9) that shows the transition from shaman/soothsayer to speaker [for God]/ prophet. "*In former times in Israel, this is what someone said when he went to inquire of Elohim* [God]: *'Let us go to the 'ra'ah'; for the nabi* [prophet / inspired] *of today was formally called 'the ra'ah'* [lit. eagle / vulture].'" Samuel is called 'the *ra'ah*' (Samuel



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ABOVE: Elijah being carried bodily to Heaven by Chariots of Fire as his disciple Elisha watches.

9:18). The 'anointing' of Saul as the first king of Israel by Samuel (Samuel 9:1–10:27) is a litany of magic and mystery and includes Saul's eating of the offered genitals (Samuel 9:24) – all English translations hide this detail with euphemisms. Saul himself became a shaman and his metamorphosis, the seven-day vigil at the henge, and the casting of lots (Samuel 10:17–24) are all part of his investiture.

Human sacrifice was not unknown to the Israelites in the Early Kingdom period (c.1200 BCE). There is a reference to human sacrifice in a henge, carried out by the shaman-prophet Samuel in Samuel 15:33b. Later, an evil spirit "from the Lord" torments Saul (Samuel 16:14 et al). Groups of naked shamans, much like 'sky-clad' Hindu sadhus, and their contagious Spirit of God, the much feared *ruakh-Elohim*, overcome King Saul who throws off his clothes and joins them (Samuel 19:20–24) and becomes a king-prophet again. Now that's a rite I've never seen in synagogue!

Saul – desperate because God won't give him dream visions, or speak to him through the jewels Urim and Tumin (Thumimm), or the prophets – consults the Witch of Endor. The woman has a *baalat-obe* ('hollow master'/'familiar spirit' – 'en-dor' means 'eye of [gyrating] circle' and is a necromancer/spirit-medium (Samuel 28), something totally forbidden the Israelites. She raises the ghost (lit. an *elohim* or god!) of Samuel "from out of the Earth". Saul is doomed. He later "falls on his own sword". (Samuel 31:4).

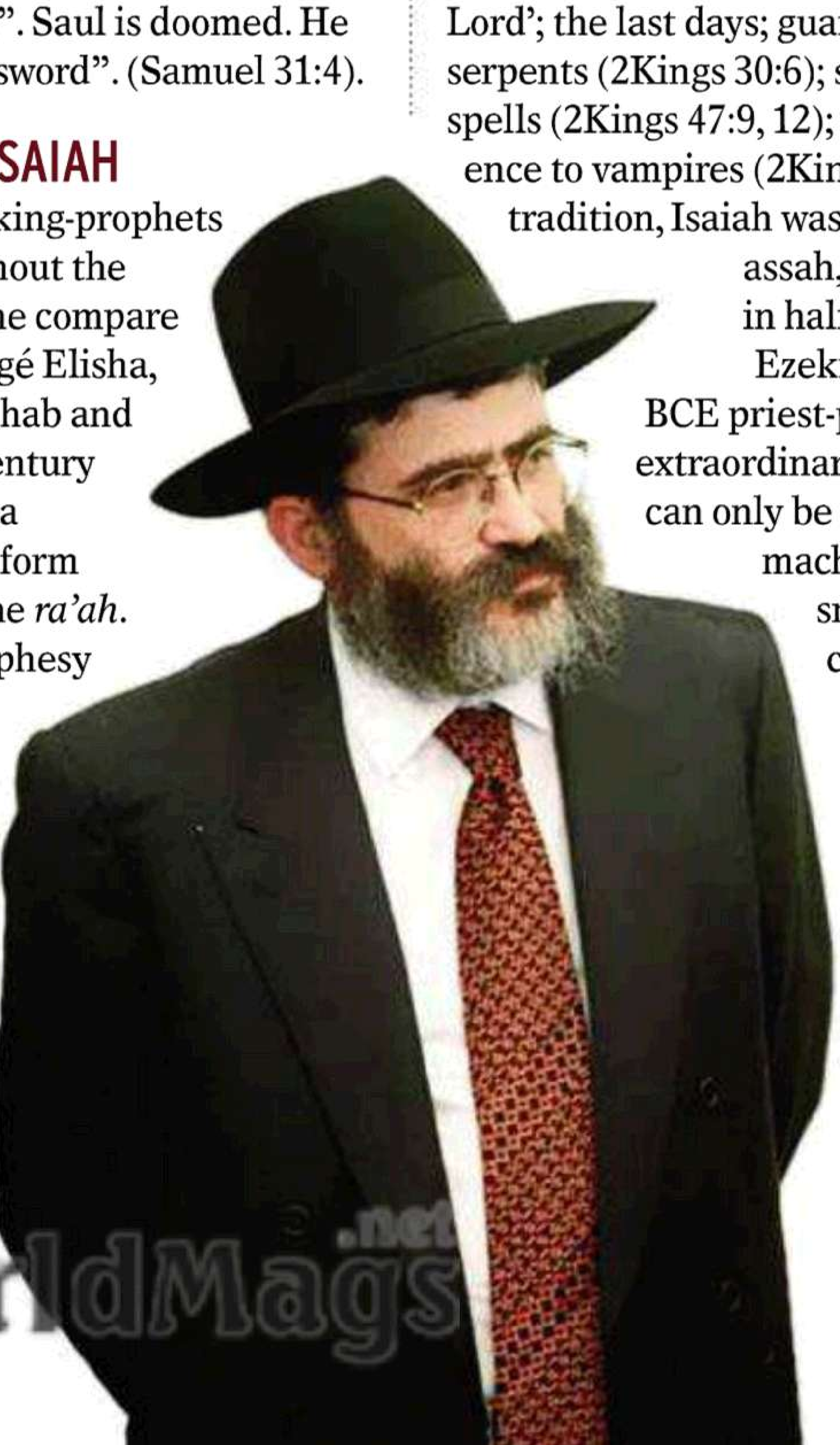
ELIJAH, EZEKIAL, ISAIAH

Many minor God-speaking-prophets are mentioned throughout the Books of Kings but none compare to Elijah and his protégé Elisha, active in the reign of Ahab and his successors (c.9th century BCE). Elijah and Elisha hark back to the older form of shaman-prophets, the *ra'ah*. Elijah doesn't just prophesy drought, he causes it; he is a 'shaman who shuts the sky'. Through an avian miracle, he is fed by ravens; he creates jars of plenty (supplies that don't run out) for a Phœnician widow; he raises her boy from the dead by lying on him three times (resuscitation? CPR?); he calls down fire from Heaven in a great contest with 450 pagan-prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel; he acquires superhuman strength to race many miles ahead of a galloping horse and chariot before a great rainstorm; he is described as a hairy-man [lit. *baal-sa'ar* – Lord hairy; a satyr; same word, same spelling] (2Kings 1:7); and uses his cloak to part the Jordan river. He does not die naturally, but is taken directly to Heaven in a whirlwind on a chariot of fire with fiery horses. His disciple, Elisha, picks up Elijah's fallen cloak, left behind.

The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha and the power-miracles continue (2Kings). He heals a spring at Jericho; he curses 42 (7x6) youths who called him 'baldy' – the hair thing again – and two bears come out of the woods and maul them; he uses music to bring the hand of God upon himself to prophesy; he duplicated many of Elijah's feats, often with refinements; he 'helps' a woman with an elderly husband get pregnant; later, when the boy dies, he sends his staff to be laid on the boy's face but this didn't work so he comes and lies on the boy, twice, the boy comes back to life, sneezes seven times and opens his eyes. Elisha feeds 100 men with 20 loaves; orders a leper to dip seven times in the Jordan to be cured; he curses his own servant with leprosy for taking gifts for healing; he makes an iron axe-head float on the surface of the water; he causes temporary blindness to enemies and "opened the eyes" of his servant to see "hills full of chariots and horses of fire".

Isaiah (c.7th cent BCE) was a literary as well as a political prophet. He is associated with visions; poetic prophecy; a solar miracle – moving shadows backwards (2Kings 20:8–11; Isa. 38:7) – the only known case of a prophet marrying a prophetess and giving their baby a prophetic name *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* ('Plunder hastens, spoil quickens'); dancing demons (2Kings 13:21); oracles against nations; 'the fearful day of the Lord'; the last days; guardian angels; flying serpents (2Kings 30:6); sorceries and potent spells (2Kings 47:9, 12); and a possible reference to vampires (2Kings 49:26). In Jewish tradition, Isaiah was killed by King Manassah, who had him sawn in half.

Ezekiel – a 6th-century BCE priest-prophet – gives an extraordinary account of what can only be described as a machine (a UFO?) with smaller machines coming out of it, and what we might call robots and beings in protective suits: *"… a figure like a man. I saw from what appeared to*



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LEFT: Rabbi Joseph Gutnick.
FACING, TOP: Rebbe Menachem Schneerson.

be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, from there down he looked like fire, and brilliant light surrounded it." (Ezekiel 1:4–28). This section is called in Hebrew *masseh merkavah* ('The Account of the Chariot'). There's nothing like it in the whole of the scriptures. So impressed was Ezekiel by this 'vision' that he dated it to the day, corresponding to 17 June (5 Tammuz), 593 BCE.

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Ezekiel was transported in the vehicle, called by him an *ofanim*, meaning 'revolving wheel', not exactly an alien abduction but the experience left him speechless for seven days (Ezekiel 3:15). During the encounter, the 'beings' called him 'human' (lit. 'son of Adam'). Ezekiel acted out prophecies; he also lay on his side for 390 days; ordered a cook to use human excrement as fuel; shaved his head and beard – something forbidden to priests – and divided the cut hair into three parts (he burned a third, ran around the city hitting another third with a sword, and threw the last third to the wind), all shamanic actions. Fourteen months later, the 'robot' returned and "*stretched forth the form of a hand and took me by my hair; and carried me between the earth and the heavens* [in the chariot] *and brought me [from Babylon] to Jerusalem in divine visions…*" (Ezekiel 8:2–4)

FORMATIVE FORTEANA

Without going through the entire Hebrew Bible for other examples, it is clear that forteana played a major role in the formation of the Israelite/Hebrew and, later, Jewish faith and, through that, into Christianity and Islam. There is no doubt that the 'prophets' were shamans, and every Canaanite – Hebrew and Pagan – community had its *ra'ah*, the man/woman with the eagle-spirit who could perform great signs and wonders. We see mention of whole communities of 'prophets', something akin to Hindu and Buddhist ashrams, as are today's Jewish Yeshivas.

'Charismatic' Christian communities today are often founded and led by shamanic types; they'd reel in horror if described as such, but the evidence is there. Shamanism still exists in Judaism; the late, great Lubavitcher (ultra-orthodox) Rebbe, Menachem Schneerson (d.1994) of New York has a reputation for performing 'wonders', and many of his most ardent disciples regard him as the Messiah and await his return. Some even claim he is not dead. This has led to great controversy in modern Judaism.

One of Rebbe Schneerson's 'wonders' was to show an Australian rabbi, Joseph Gutnick, after the Stock Market crash in 1987, where to find gold and diamonds using only a large scale map of Australia, a piece of gold and a diamond. Schneerson knew very little about Australia but prophesied that the young rabbi would become very wealthy. When Gutnick got back to Oz, non-Jewish mining executives and the media laughed at him when he told this prophecy to anyone who'd listen. They thought he'd lost his marbles. They stopped laughing when Gutnick's companies, *Legend International Holdings* and *North Australia Diamonds*, found huge reserves of gold and diamonds exactly where Rebbe Schneerson had said he'd find them.

Rabbi (Diamond Joe) Gutnick is now a mining magnate, and one of Australia's richest men. He earned a seat on the World Gold Council. He bankrolled Benjamin Netanyahu's election as Israeli Prime Minister. Rabbi Gutnick lives modestly in Melbourne and gives most of his ever-increasing wealth to charity. Now that's a verifiable 'sign and wonder' attributable to a modern-day Jewish shaman-prophet!

It is my contention that because the old wonder stories were taught in every community where Jews went – all over Eurasia and North Africa – and were then transmitted further through Christianity and Islam, that our culture(s) became inculcated with an acceptance of strange phenomena. It wasn't surprising – they were experienced; indeed, they were expected. There's even an ancient Jewish blessing one says when a fortean phenomenon happens; it's found in most Jewish Prayer-books:

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam

(Blessed are You, ADONAI [GOD], ruler of the Universe)

Mishaneh ha-briyot

(Who makes strange creatures/ strangeness.)

It has only been since the so-called Age of Reason that shamanism, charismatic religion, and forteana have been artificially removed from their societal norms and 're-classified' as absurd or even abhorrent. Those who experienced such phenomena are now to be regarded as insane, liars, or weirdoes, to be despised and shunned. But remember; sanity is only a state of mind.

God bless you all. FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

RICHARD SEARY has a long association with *FT* and his monthly *FT*s are delights of his declining years. He lives in Australia and when not studying and teaching archaic 'biblical' Hebrew, he keeps an abiding interest in the world of the weird, particularly of religion, faith and spirituality.

GLOSSARY

AKIVA – Rebbe Akiva ben Yosef, one of the founders of Rabbinical Judaism (ca.50–ca.135 CE), martyred by the Romans for his supposed role in the 2nd Jewish-Roman War, by being flayed alive with iron combs. Akiva is frequently quoted in the Talmud.

CHUMASH – (lit.) 'the Five': the Torah, the Books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. See Tanakh.

KABBALA (Quabbala, Cabala) – philosophic Jewish mysticism and praxis, which gained wide acceptance in Jewish communities since the 9th century CE, and the publication of its principle text, the *Zohar*. Most in modern Orthodox and Conservative Judaism regard Kabbala as mediæval superstition, but ultra-Orthodox and *Hassidic* Jews still swear by it. It has regained popularity in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and not only among Jews.

RAMBAM – acronym of Spanish born Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (1135–1204 CE), scholar, doctor, polymath and founder of modern Judaism. He wrote in Arabic, Hebrew, Spanish, and Greek. His *Guide for the Perplexed* is the standard, authoritative work on Judaism. His medical texts were very advanced, dismissing the idea of disease being caused by curses and demons, saying they were of biological origin. He wrote 10 known medical works including a pharmacopœia with drug names in Arabic, Greek, Syrian (Aramaic), Berber, Persian and Spanish. He wrote on Muslim 'issues' under his Arabic name – Abu 'Imran Musa bin Ubardallah Maimun al-Qurtubi – and he is still quoted by Islamic scholars today.

RASHI – French Rabbi and master sage (1040–1105 CE); his Bible commentaries are still used today.

SHAMAN – anthropological term from old Turkic-Siberian cultures; a 'witch-doctor' whose primary task is to be a *psychopomp* (lit. '*guide of souls*'). They act as gateways to other spiritual realms, through various means and are strongly associated with healing and divination.

TALMUD – a vast collection of Jewish lore, law, precedents, rulings, legends and commentaries, largely unknown beyond Jewish circles, redacted by Rabbi Judah haNasi (c.170 CE) from much older material – the Oral Law. There are two Talmuds, the Jerusalem and Babylonian; the Babylonian is the more authoritative as the Babylonian Jewish 'academies' flourished beyond the suppression of Jews by the Roman Empire after 70 CE.

TANAKH – a contraction of three Hebrew words meaning Law, Prophets and Writings, meaning the whole of the Jewish Bible. The most holy section is the *Torah* (Law), best known as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

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The Fortean Times Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice

No 41: EARTH MYSTERIES: PART 1

What are known in fortean circles as 'Earth mysteries' amount to a collection – some might say a mish-mash – of sometimes conflicting, sometimes heterogeneous, beliefs, pursuits, and researches. It's not an exaggeration to say that these range from the wholly *woo* (as the sceptics would say) to the severely disciplined. The pother, in all its glory, is essentially a wide spectrum of discussions over the meaning and significance of ancient monuments and artefacts scattered over the world's landscapes. In the first part of this entry we shall endeavour to outline some of the more eccentric approaches to the subject. In the second part, we'll look at how some of these approaches have led to more disciplined investigation.

On the left, or woo, wing of the discussion we have the following – in no particular order of prejudice:

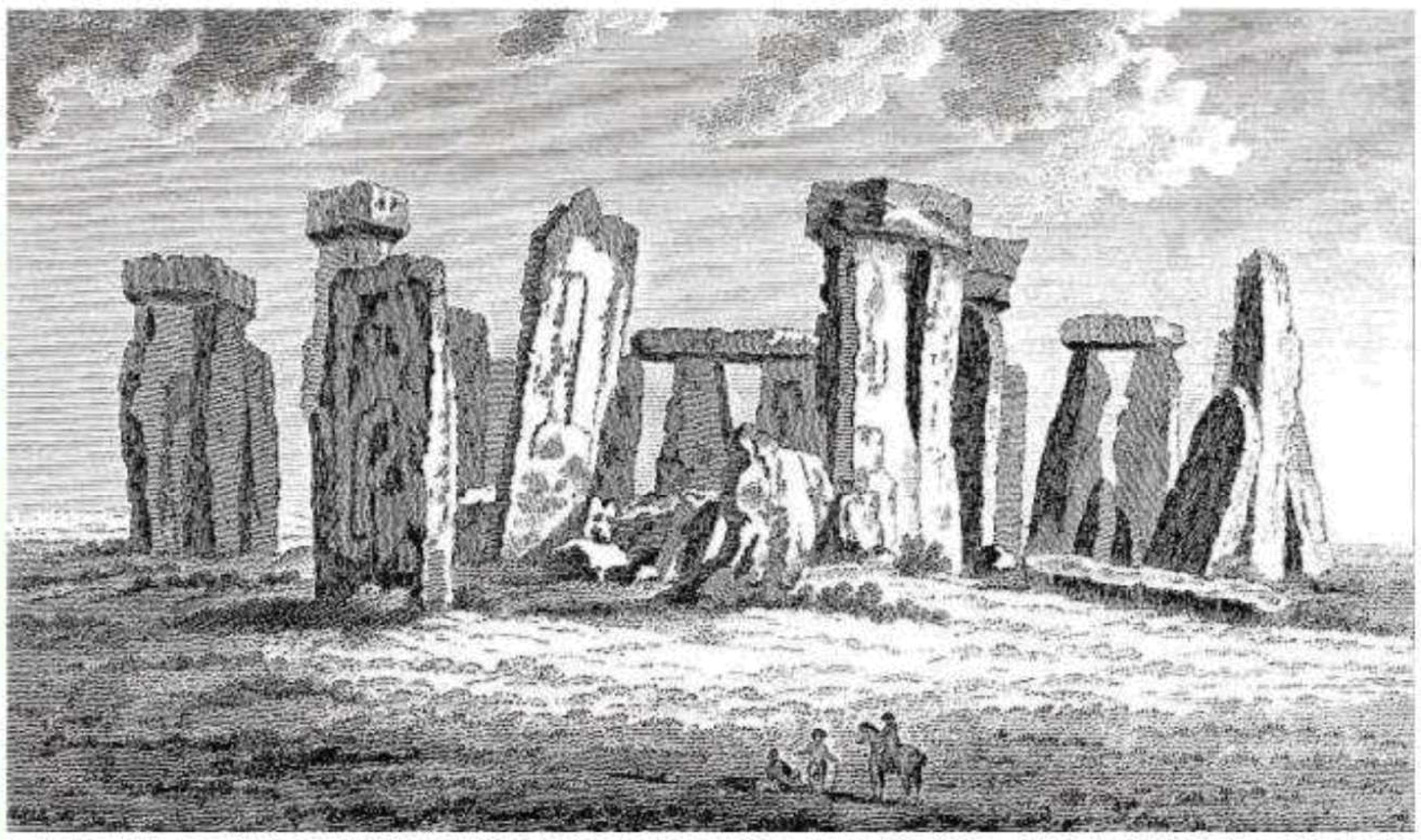
- **Leys (or 'leylines')**: The notion of leys was first proposed by British inventor, businessman, and pioneer photographer, Alfred Watkins (right), initially in an address to the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club in 1921. Late in June that year, gazing at a map, he had noticed how various landmarks seemed to run in straight lines across the Herefordshire landscape. In *The Old Straight Track* (1925), he proposed that they were ancient trading roads, laid out by prehistoric surveyors on lines-of-sight – hence their straightness. The vestiges of these straight tracks had survived mainly as alignments, which he dubbed "leys", of various kinds of ancient site. The sites themselves were built at key sighting-points along the tracks – not aligned for mystical, magical or any other mysterious reason.

This modest observation suggested nothing paranormal, but over the years it became festooned with fantastic accretions. By the 1960s, leys had become "leylines", and were variously interpreted as lines of occult force (an idea hatched by Dion Fortune in the 1936 novel *The Goat-Foot God*); or magnetic lines in the ground facilitating the trajectories of UFOs (originated by Tony Wedd in a 1961 pamphlet, *Skyways and Landmarks*); or dowsable lines of mysterious unspecified 'energies'. This last was first proposed by Arthur Lawton in a 1939 pamphlet, *Mysteries of Ancient Man*, and has been reprised many times since: for most people today it is the default interpretation of the term 'leyline', rather like the extraterrestrial hypothesis in ufology. Much of what has been written and said about leys is hearsay, especially in New Age literature, and most people who bandy around ideas about 'energies' seem to be unaware that there never has been an archæological entity called a leyline.[1]

TOPFOTO / TOPHAM PICTUREPOINT

In the 1970s, however, a degree of rationality prevailed, in that there was intense debate about the statistics associated with drawing straight lines on maps linking points representing ancient sites. Much of that was conducted in the pages of *The Ley Hunter* (published 1969–1998) and other specialist journals. One problem was that the British landscape is crammed with such sites: draw a straight line between any two and sooner or later it will meet a third or fourth. This is also true of random dots.[2] Unfortunately, such caveats tended not to leak from the specialist press into popular consciousness.

- **'Flying saucers' and 'ufology'.** This was a major influence on the very early Earth Mysteries pioneers. One, the aforementioned Tony Wedd, linked leys with French ufologist Aimé Michel's (long since discredited) notion that UFOs tended to fly in straight lines; he seems to have got the idea that leys were magnetic from that redoubtable fount of authentic wisdom, contactee Buck Nelson (see **FT269:51**), who had claimed that saucers flew by picking up magnetic energy from lines in the Earth (although before him George Adamski had maintained that Venusian craft were powered by magnetism). The megalithic sites were navigational aids for the ufonauts, whose technology apparently did not rise to maps, radar, astral navigation, and so on.



ABOVE: The Neolithic monument Stonehenge, whose original purpose remains much debated.
BELOW: Edward Williams re-invented the modern Druidic tradition with little of their actual history known.

Then, in 1967, John Michell published his phenomenally eccentric but remarkably influential *The Flying Saucer Vision*, in which he yoked together such heterogeneous items as dragons (although these were benign *Chinese* dragons, not the malign and fearsome ones of European tradition),[3] megalithic sites, much folklore and legend, the Holy Grail, and UFOs. Stonehenge, we are told, is "a structure which accurately reproduces the flying saucer as it is said to appear today", while "sun worship was only a corruption of an earlier cult, that of the flying saucer."[4] Ancient gods were, essentially, ufonauts. None of this was very far away from the ideas published (in German) the same year in *Chariots of the Gods?* by Erich von Däniken – enough said?

The theme of 'ancient astronauts' has since largely evaporated from discussions of Earth mysteries. But 'Earth energies' have had a new boost over the last couple of decades from those who are not taken by the idea that people make crop circles, but who are disinclined to attribute field art to aliens in flying discs. Vaguely defined 'energies', even more immaterial than magnetism but detectable by dowsers, are held to be responsible. At the further end of this scale is the belief that these, and the crop patterns they produce, are often the expression of a troubled chthonic consciousness, *alias* Gaia or Mother Earth. That the circles clustered in Wiltshire (as they still do), already deemed a mysterious landscape overflowing with mystic energy by the New Age, only added power to this kind of conjecture.

- **Speculations about lost civilisations**. John Michell's early books implied that there was a "lost wisdom of the ancients" encoded in Neolithic and early Bronze Age monuments. In articles in the late Sixties printed in the hippies' parish magazine, *International Times*, Michell was overt about this, speaking of *"small, highly civilised communities, ordering their lives according to the will of God, precisely expressed in the great poem… The poem reflected the whole range of human existence, the ritualised events of everyday life and the dream adventures encountered on the plane of ecstasy. It described the relationship of man to his environment, of the earth to the heavens, of science to the spirit. In all their activities men lived out the poem, achieving by the sacred ritual of their very existence a state of tranquil certainty derived from a conscious unity between their movements and those of the heavenly bodies. They lived on the edge of a dream, their only ambition to penetrate to the very depths of the universe, to make their great poem perfect and complete."*

Michell conjured this "great poem" straight out of his own head, in common with many of the 'facts' he adduced, but it was crucial to recreate the spirit in which it was conceived, he believed. He ends the piece on an apocalyptic note: "The impossibility of meaningful scientific progress is apparent. The comforts of vague mysticism are unreal. The answer can be found, but not in any system old or new. Perhaps some of those that find it, those that escape their human murderers, can survive the approaching cosmic terror."[5] We can hear quite precise echoes of this apocalypticism today in those who link the 'message' of the crop circles with the great change in consciousness or End of the World that is supposed to occur in December 2012. *Plus ça change.* Michell at least had the wherewithal not to be specific about dates.

Others were more cosmopolitan in their 'analysis' of megalithic monuments. The notion that Stonehenge was built by refugees from Atlantis (for instance) goes back at least to William Scott-Elliot, who in *The Story of Atlantis* (1896) based his assertions and speculations on the "astral clairvoyance" of Theosophist CW Leadbeater. 'Proof' consisted largely of the coincidence that Plato's Atlantis was built in concentric rings, as is Stonehenge as we know it. The "rude simplicity" of Stonehenge, Scott-Elliot explains authoritatively, "was intended as a protest against the extravagant ornament and over-decoration of the existing temples in Atlantis, where the debased worship of their own images was being carried on by the inhabitants". Despite the dubious provenance of such factoids, the idea lives on still: for example, Alan G Hefner considers it "plausible" in his entry on Stonehenge on his website (www.themystica.com/mystica/default.html).

- **Psychic archæology**. Using psychometrists (mediums who claim to be able to pick up information by psychic means from objects and places) at ancient sites was very popular in the 1930s, and revived in the 1960s. The spectacular lack of success psychics have in matters closer to home (e.g. detecting murderers) gives one little confidence in the technique. The same inconsistency in results can be found in dowsing, also widely employed at ancient sites, with questionable results and even more questionable interpretations.

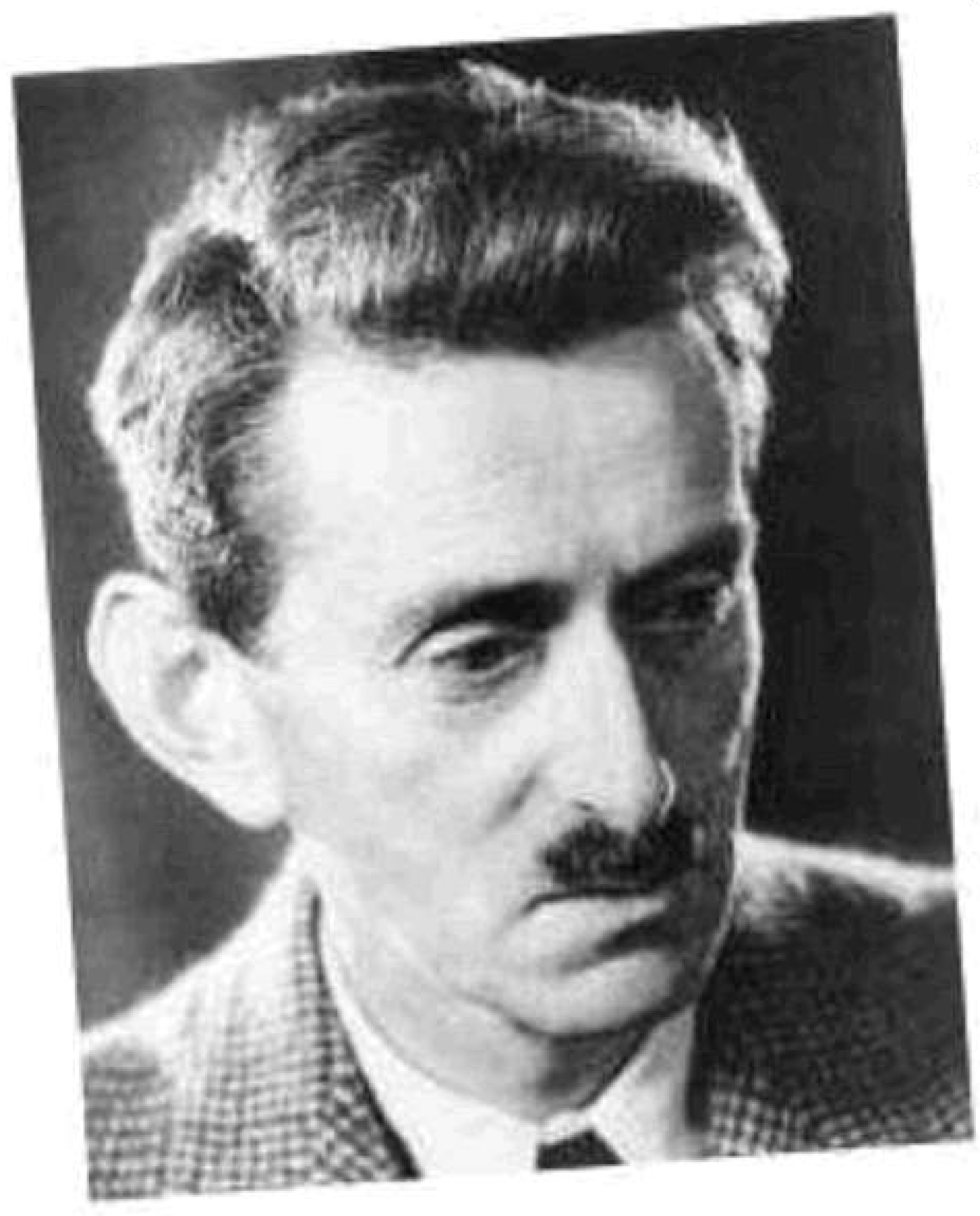
- **Neopaganism**. All that needs to be said here on this aspect of Earth mysteries is that the modern Druid 'tradition' and its rituals, particularly as known in Wales, was largely invented by a failed businessman and laudanum addict, Iolo Morgannwg, alias Edward Williams (1747–1826). Claims that Wicca is a resurrection-cum-continuation of the pre-Christian pagan 'Old Religion' don't stand up to scrutiny – in its present form it seems to be an eclectic *mélange* of New Age ideas, with a dash of radical feminism, and a core of creative interpretations of many (not always related, and not all reliable) sources synthesised in various books by Gerald Brousseau Gardner (1884–1964).[6] Its ceremonial, besides, seems nearer witchcraft than religion, old or new. That said, if people wish to don strange garb (or none at all) and perform harmless rituals from which they gain spiritual nourishment and new friends, let no one stand in their way.

- **Effects** of sacred and venerated places on mind and body. The obvious difficulty arises of separating the occurrence of an objective event from the fulfilment of subjective and perhaps unconscious expectation. This is the bugbear of all 'psychic' events, from phantasms to healing. But there has been some disciplined research into the effects of ancient sites on dreaming, which we will look at in the next part; and the discovery of magnetic anomalies (also found in some ‘haunted’ houses) and variable radiation spikes at certain megalithic sites may help to explain some of the reported psychic phenomena.

- **Traditional systems** such as Chinese *Feng-shui* landscape divination, Old European locational, metrological or calendrical traditions, or shamanic religions worldwide. It’s a moot point whether it’s appropriate to import foreign (in all senses of the word) systems into the assessment of ancient monuments, whether that means applying modern global assumptions to highly regionalised cultures of which we know almost nothing, or thinking that a superficial acquaintance with subtle Oriental disciplines will reveal very much about a largely hidden European past. On the other hand, there is a wealth of indications and clues that many ancient sites have calendrical significance and that some, at least, were used in some kind of shamanic rituals, particularly involving trance. More on these aspects of the topic in the next part.

- **Ancient metrology** and the geometry and ratios inherent in temple architecture or Neolithic monument groundplans. Some of the wilder characters and hairier pronouncements of Earth mysteries feature in this aspect of the topic. Their chief representatives are perhaps Charles Piazzi Smyth (1819–1900), long the Astronomer Royal for Scotland, and his monumental *Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid* (1864), inspired by one John Taylor, who had concluded that the architect of the Great Pyramid at Giza was the Biblical Noah, of Flood fame, and that it was built “to make a record of the measure of the Earth”. Smyth measured every aspect of the pyramid that he could, and came to conclusions of his own. As in, the (Imperial) inch was God-given, and the ‘pyramid inch’ of 1.001in was used in planning and building the Great Pyramid; there exists a relationship between the height of the pyramid in inches to the distance from the Earth to the Sun; and he deduced the existence of a ‘pyramid pint’ and a pyramid scale of temperature. Perhaps most grandiose was his pronouncement that the numbers hidden in the monument revealed the date of the Second Coming – 1882. This prediction appears to have been mistaken.[7]

Also much taken with measures and numbers was engineering don Alexander Thom (1894–1985) (below), whose day job led him to a number of important advances in fluid mechanics. Thom spent decades surveying more than 600 megalithic sites in the UK with a precision not matched before or since. In the process, he founded the discipline of archæoastronomy and (he believed) discovered the ancient measure used to lay out the sites, the megalithic yard. Thom, in short, was no Piazzi Smyth; and while his work was – and remains – controversial, it was too closely argued to be dismissed out of hand by the archæological and astronomical establishments.[8]


UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD/DEPARTMENT OF ENGINEERNG SCIENCE

Some of it, however, was really *too* closely argued. Thom’s meticulous surveys revealed that many stone ‘circles’ are egg-shaped, somewhat flattened, or ellipsoid, and he constructed some highly sophisticated internal geometry to explain how they had been laid out. Two sceptical academics, John Barnatt and Gordon Moir, however, observed that *on the ground* these circles seemed quite regular – circular in fact – to the eye. Barnatt showed experimentally that laying out ‘circles’ on the ground by eye alone will give the same results, and concluded that elaborate methods had probably not been used at the ancient sites either. The megalithic yard (2.72ft/0.83m) still has adherents, although it’s also been ascribed to an average of the human stride, and even dismissed as “a chimera, a grotesque statistical misconception”. Thom maintained that “There must have been a headquarters from which standard rods were sent out”, but archæologists have failed to find any. Thom’s claimed astronomical alignments have been questioned because of their inconsistency, the problem of dating sites to establish which celestial objects then coincided with other landscape features, and the possibility (some say likelihood) that they are due to coincidence.

Apart from his magnificent surveys, Prof. Thom nonetheless deserves recognition for having started a genuine debate among academic experts. While the intended astronomical alignments at many sites remain ambiguous and imprecise, others do not (the classic instance is Newgrange in Ireland). These too we’ll examine in the next instalment.

Meanwhile, we’re left with a powerful sense of lost knowledge – even were all these problems solved, we would still not – and may never – know quite how all these sites were used, or the social and/or religious purposes they served.

- Apologies for the slip in the previous entry that teleported the miracle of the water-into-wine from Cana to Canaan. One would like to pretend it was a deliberate error designed to test the erudition of *FT*’s assiduous subs, but it wasn’t; it was some kind of atavistic fumble of the digits, and should have been caught before the copy went down the wormhole from Tibet to London.

NOTES

1 Watkins wasn’t entirely comfortable with using the word ‘ley’, which in Anglo-Saxon means a meadow or large cleared space, and eventually abandoned the term. His notion of ancient trading routes was distantly echoed in Xavier Guichard’s 1936 book *Eleuse Alaise: Enquête sur les origines de la civilisation européenne*, which proposed an ancient system of straight lines radiating from Alaise and that had been used as salt-trading routes. Guichard however went a great deal further than that, claiming to have discovered an ancient system of geographic co-ordinates, connecting everything ultimately with the Hellenic Eleusinian mysteries.

2 See for instance Robert Forrest: “The mathematical case against ley lines and related topics”, *Journal of Geomancy*, Vol I No 1 (1976), pp10–14. Also available at: http://bit.ly/nV08Jt (cantab.net).

3 For more on this, see Ronald Hutton: *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, Blackwell, 1991, pp125–6.

4 Michell’s geomantic ideas were further developed in *The View Over Atlantis*, Sago, 1969.

5 An earlier article (*International Times*, 6–20 Oct 1967) by Michell, “Centres and Lines of the Latent Power in Britain”, opens: “This is a time of crisis, of questions yet unframed, old assumptions crumbling into a void, the new communication undeveloped. There can be no further progress in the old terms. The next step, whatever it may involve, a stage in evolution, contact with life from beyond the terrestrial limit or from beyond the normal human vision, or the rediscovery of a lost source of inspiration on earth, can only take place in a land where the *genius loci*, the native spirit, is still capable of being evoked. [..] Within reach of our combined efforts is the achievement of the new vision through the rediscovery of the old.”

6 Margot Adler (*Drawing Down the Moon*,1986, p93) defined the “most authentic and hallowed Wiccan tradition” as “stealing from any source that didn’t run away too fast”.

7 Believing the inch to be a divinely-ordained measure, Smyth waged a lifelong campaign against any adoption of metric units as a dread invention of atheistical French radicals (so he wasn’t wrong about everything).

8 Alexander Thom drew attention and criticism in part because his fellow academics respected him for his personal qualities, not least his integrity. His obituary in the *Journal* of the Royal Astronomical Society (Vol 28, 1985, pp178–82), written by one his major critics, DC Heggie, gives something of the flavour of the man: “If the criticism which often came his way did not leave him untouched, then neither did it deflect him from what he saw as the right way to conduct his prehistoric studies. This imperturbable side of his intellect was partnered with a tough and wiry constitution. For many years the bath he used was fed from an outdoor supply and situated outside, near an adjoining outhouse. When a young colleague was enjoying Thom’s hospitality he was told as he was served his breakfast coffee that his host had already put in salt ‘but did not know if he also wanted mustard in it’.” The obituary ends: “And however the controversy over his contribution is finally settled, it will not be forgotten that he was a scholar of remarkable breadth and energy, and a genuine seeker after truth.”

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The Forever 27 Club

With Amy Winehouse the latest star to join the so-called '27 Club', **CHRISTIAN SAUNDERS** ponders the pop-cultural curse that appears to make 27 a particularly dangerous age for musicians.

CHRISTIAN SAUNDERS is a freelance writer and ESL teacher. His latest novella, zombie-fest "Dead of Night", is available now on Damnation Books. He is currently being haunted by the number 27.

On the afternoon of Saturday 23 July 2011, five-time Grammy Award-winning singer Amy Winehouse was found dead in her London home at the age of 27. At the time of writing, the circumstances surrounding her death are still under investigation. But Winehouse, often described as a 'lost soul', never seemed entirely comfortable with stardom and her battles with drugs and alcohol are well documented. The passing of this popular and unique talent is a tragic loss indeed, but her premature demise solidifies her position not just in pop culture but also within the realms of folklore – because only in death could she be granted entry into the fabled 27 Club.

The 27 Club – variously known as Club 27, the Curse of 27 and the Forever 27 Club – comprises an eclectic and exclusive collection of influential musicians, all of whom died at the age of 27. Some of the most notable previous additions include Rolling Stone Brian Jones (died 3 July 1969), Jimi Hendrix (18 September 1970), Janis Joplin (4 October 1970), Jim Morrison (3 July 1971) and Kurt Cobain (5 April 1994).

It should be noted, too, that most of these deaths occurred under mysterious circumstances and, to this day, speculation and controversy rage about many of them. As recently as August 2009, Sussex police launched a review of the Brian Jones case, 40 years after he was found dead in his swimming pool, when new allegations were levelled at a builder working on Jones's property at the time of his death. Presumably, the review is ongoing.

Another member, Richey Edwards of the Manic Street Preachers, only officially joined the 27 Club when he was declared dead on 23 November 2008, having gone missing over 13 years earlier. He is believed to have committed suicide by throwing himself from the Severn Bridge, though no body was ever found.

Many of the celebrity deaths above are linked by some bizarre and unlikely correlations. For example, Hendrix, Joplin and Morrison all knew each other and died within a 10-month period. Jones and Morrison died *on the same day*, two years apart. And Cobain was married to Courtney Love, who was pictured as a five-year-old child on the back of the Grateful Dead's 1969 album *Aoxomoxoa* along with Ron 'Pigpen' McKernan (who joined the 27 Club on 8 March 1973), and played in the grunge band Hole with Kristen Pfaff (who became a member on 16 June 1994).[1] Hendrix, who was born on 27 November, counted astrology as one of his hobbies and said many times that he expected to die at 27. This kind of foresight or foreboding seems to have been mirrored in Winehouse's behaviour in the final weeks of her life. Though she stopped short of openly predicting her death (unless you believe some of the more bizarre Internet theories[2]) she is known to have spent time tracking down long-lost friends and acquaintances, as if wanting to say goodbye.

Wikipedia lists over 40 other musicians who met their end at 27. The Drifters, Canned Heat, the Stooges, Badfinger, Uriah Heep, the Minutemen, Echo & the Bunnymen, the Mars Volta and American Head Charge have all lost members, as have a plethora of lesser-known acts. Admittedly, most are hardly household names, and sceptics would argue that if you took the trouble to research how old *every* musician was when they died, statistically no more would have died at 26, say, or 28 than 27. But even the most cursory research blows this theory out of the water. There are a few other ages with slightly higher

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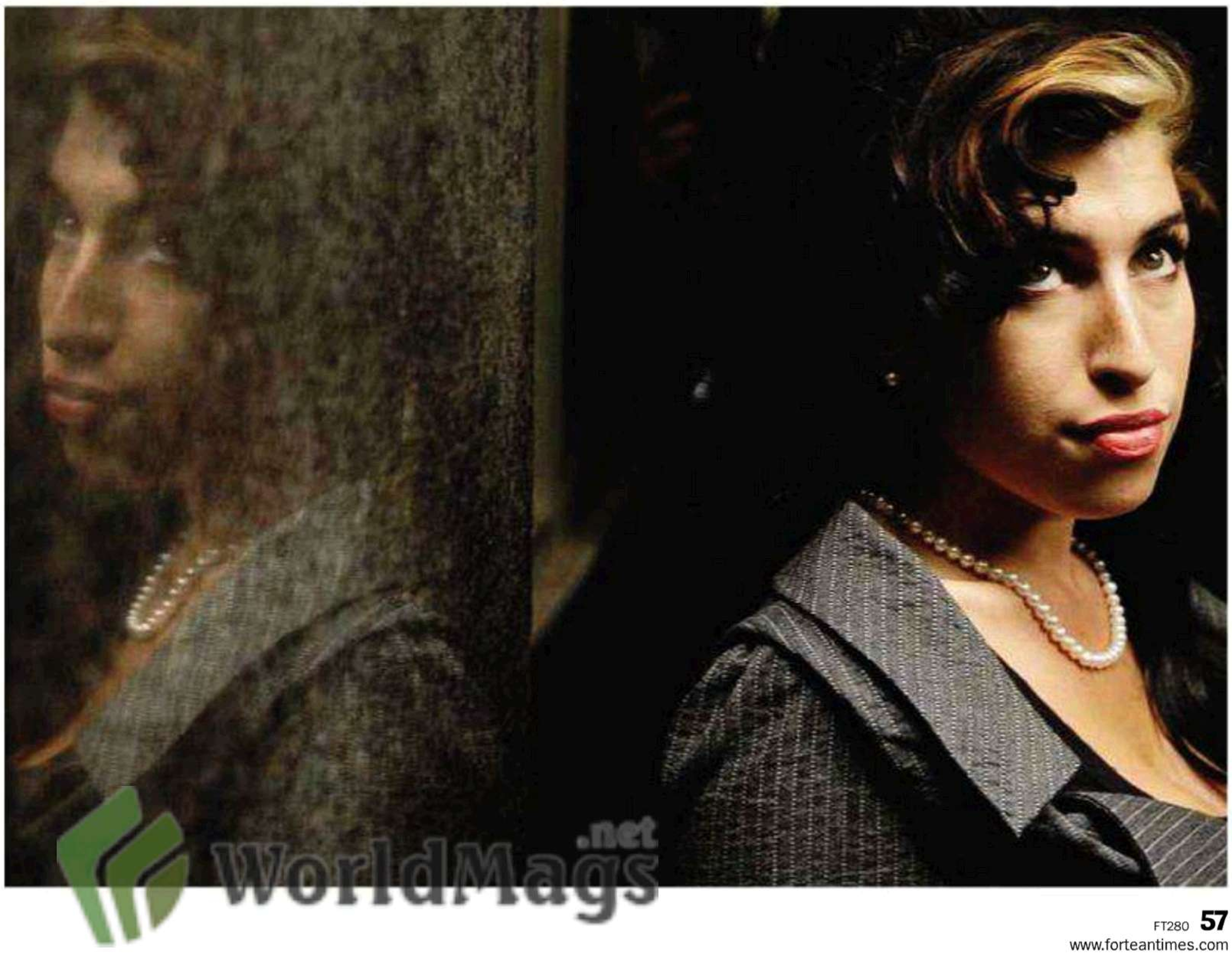

BELOW: The latest member to join the 27 Club, Londoner Amy Winehouse.

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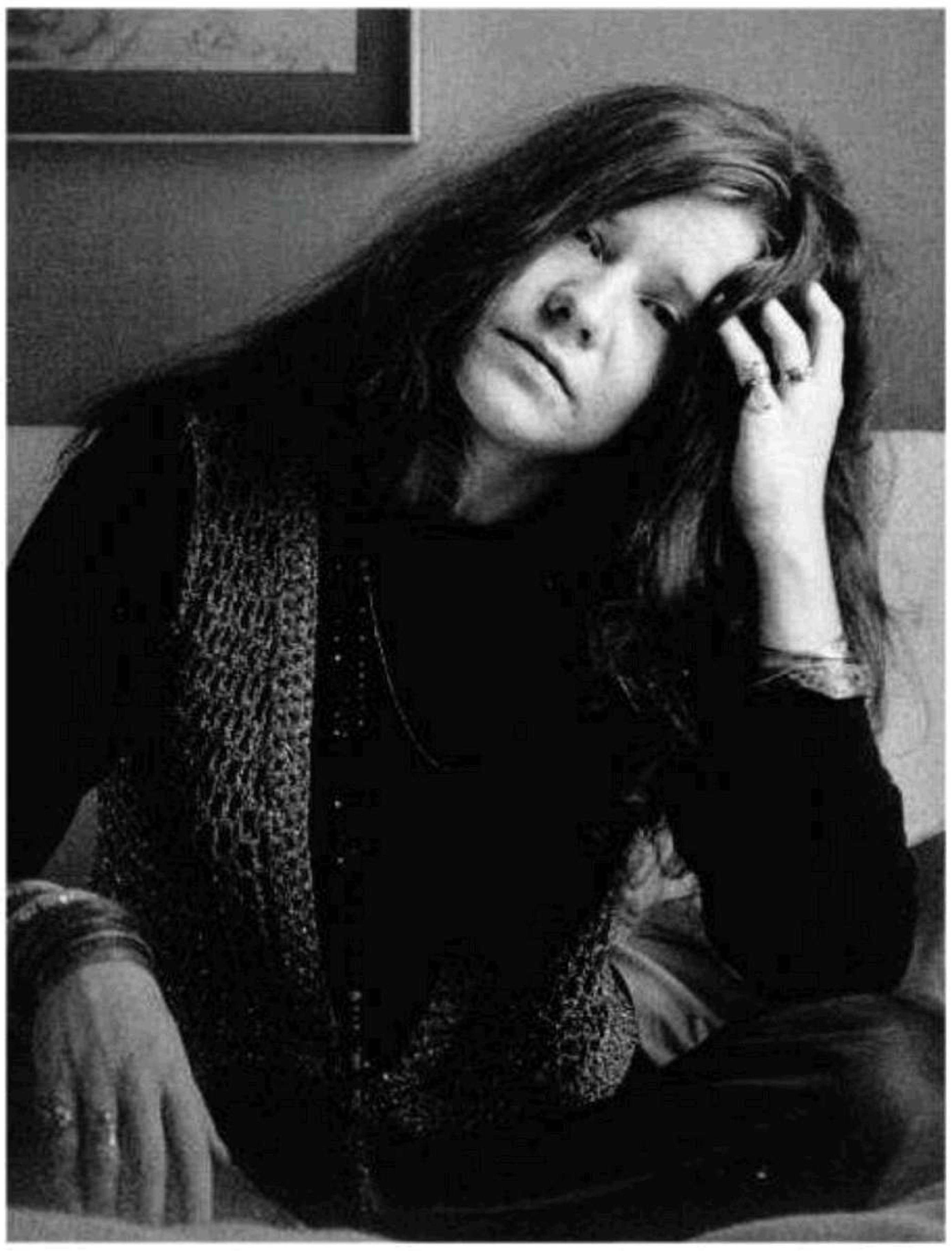

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than average results, such as 29 and 33, but even these pale in comparison. As biographer Charles R Cross says, "The number of musicians who passed away at 27 is truly remarkable by any standard. Though humans die regularly at all ages, there is a statistical spike for those who die at 27." [3]

In another strange twist, the curse of 27 is believed by some to have begun with the legendary bluesman Robert Johnson, a primary influence on many modern guitar slingers, who is famously said to have made a Faustian deal with the Devil. Johnson's life (and death) was poorly documented but the widely accepted, heavily romanticised version of events maintains that after beginning his career as a mediocre guitarist playing on street corners, he met the Devil at a crossroads near Dockery Plantation, Mississippi, at midnight. There, the Devil took his guitar, tuned it, and handed it back, giving him a mastery of the instrument and thereby inventing the Delta Blues.

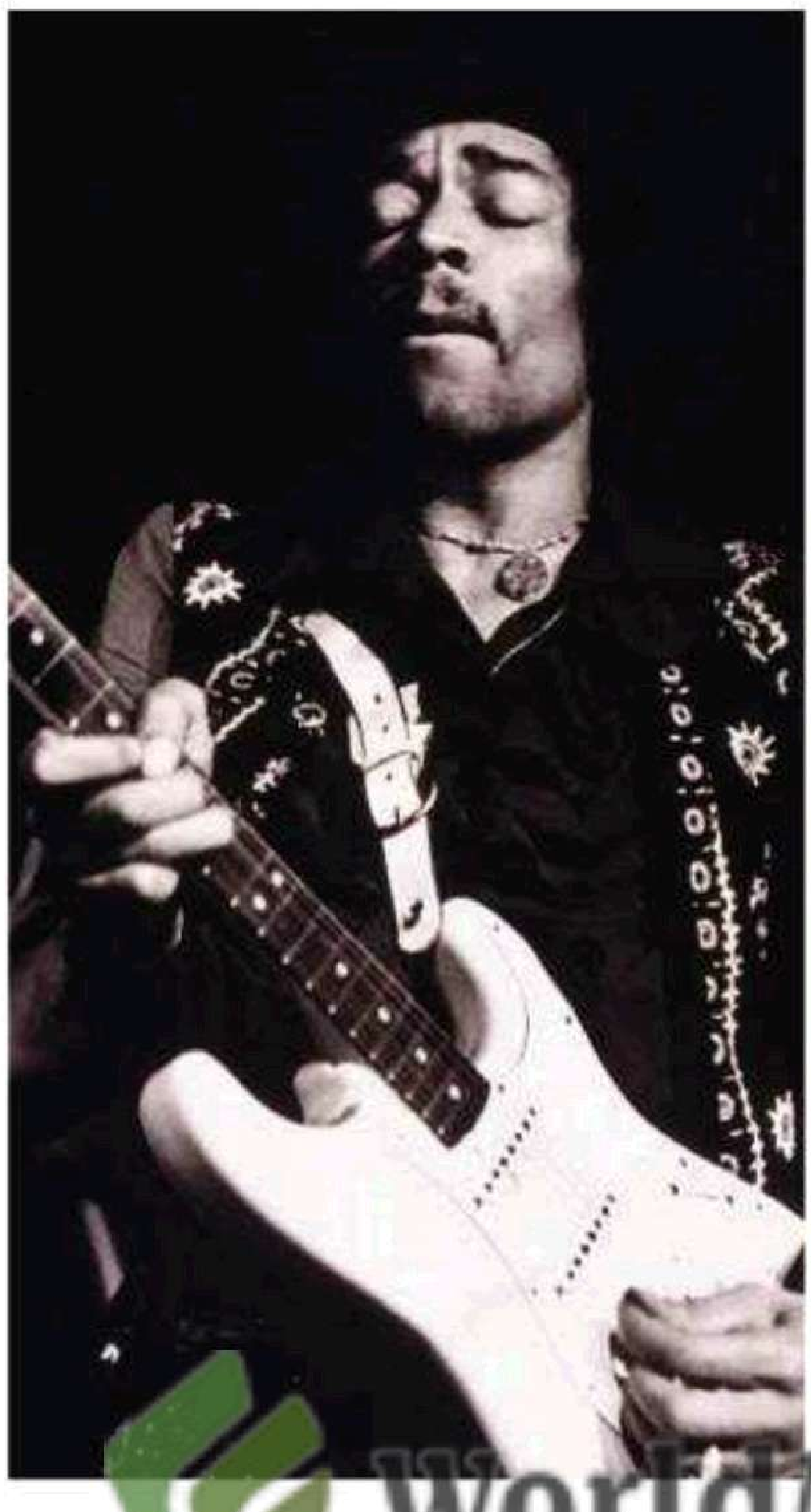
Johnson's popularity soared, and by the time he was 27 he was one of the most sought-after musicians in the area. With his new-found fame came success with the ladies, and his death on 16 August 1938 is said to have been a result of strychnine poisoning, the deadly substance passed to him in a whiskey bottle by a jealous husband.

We'll probably never know the exact circumstances of Johnson's death, but all these years later, and in light of other developments, we can make certain observations. During his lifetime, Johnson was a nomadic traveller and notorious womaniser. He never really made it big, and at the peak of his powers only ever played small dance halls and the like, never achieving any level of fame until 1961 when Columbia bought the rights to his back catalogue and released the seminal album *King of the Delta Blues Singers, Volume I*. It has been suggested (though never proved) that during the mastering process the original recordings were speeded up, giving them an 'otherworldly' quality and making them sound much more impressive than they really were. [4] Furthermore, some observers claim that the 'Devil' he so often sang and talked about was, in fact, a metaphorical name he had for whiskey. The 1986 film *Crossroads* is loosely based on Johnson's story. [5]

Certainly, the rock 'n' roll lifestyle and years of excess seem to be major contributing factors in a large number of 27 Club deaths, but among the overdoses and suicides there have also been some bizarre and unlikely 'accidents'. Malcolm Hale of Spanky and Our Gang was gassed by a faulty space heater, Leslie Harvey of the Scottish blues band Stone the Crows was electrocuted live on stage by a microphone, and Roger Lee Durham of Bloodstone fell off a horse. Yes, accidents happen, but there does seem to be a higher probability of 'something happening' to musicians when they are 27 years old. A significant number were murdered, with Mia Zapata of Seattle punk band the Gits being the subject of an *Unsolved Mysteries* segment. Incidentally, a benefit concert in her honour marked one of Kurt Cobain's last live appearances before he committed suicide, yet another of those tenuous yet undeniable links between various members of the 27 Club.

It has been suggested that the very lure of joining the exclusive 27 Club and guaranteeing some level of rock 'n' roll immortality has been too much for some to resist. Shortly after Cobain's death, his mother Wendy O'Connor proclaimed: "Now he's gone and joined that stupid club! I told him not to join that stupid club!" [6] This attests to the fact that mother and son must have had previous conversations about the 27 Club. Interestingly, several researchers have noted that during his formative years Cobain mistakenly believed that the 'Big Five' [7] all died by their own hand. This may have had

The rock 'n' roll lifestyle plays a part in the curse of 27



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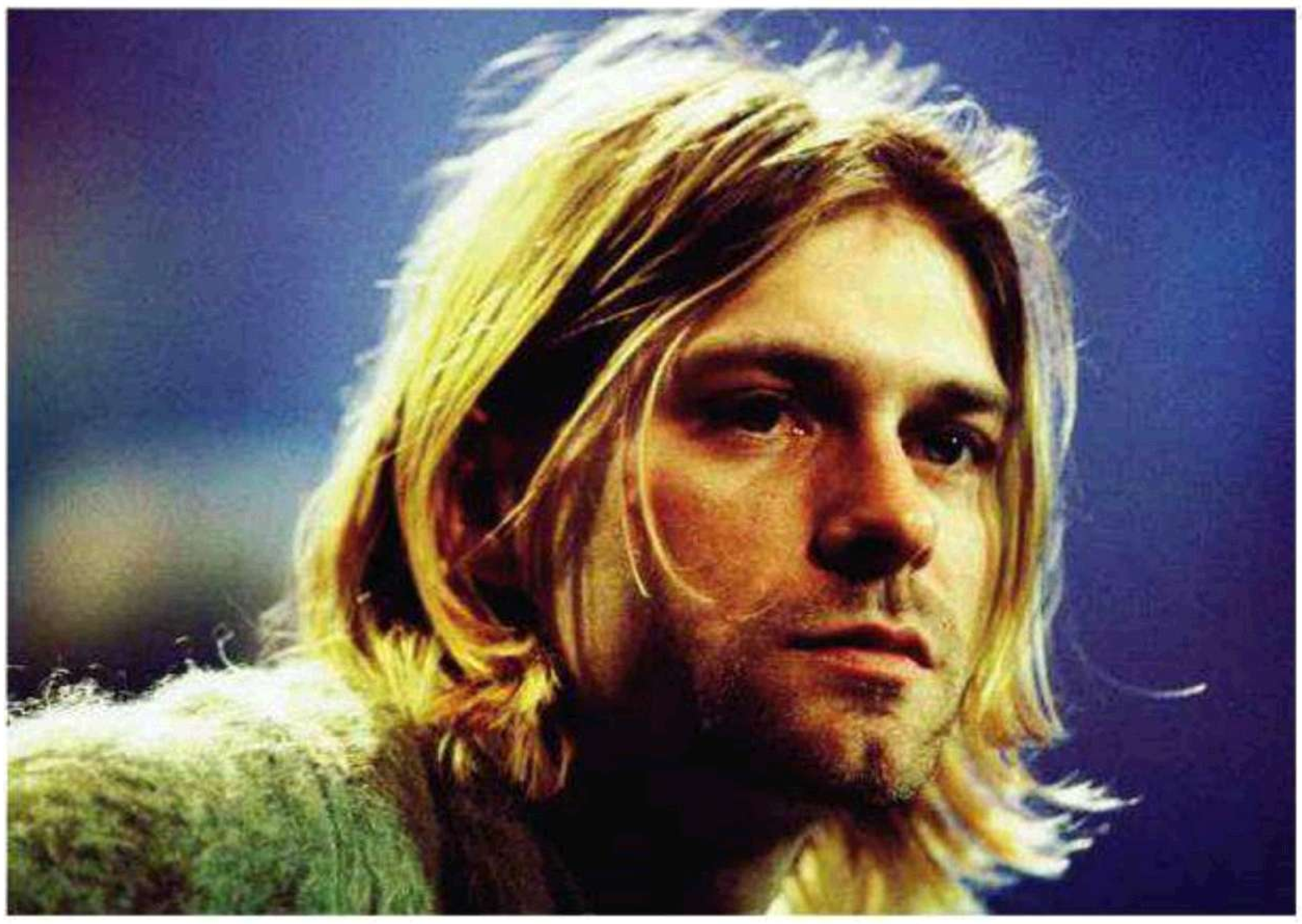
ABOVE LEFT: Texan Janis Joplin, who rose to fame during San Francisco's Sixties boom, died of an accidental heroin overdose in 1970.

ABOVE RIGHT: Rolling Stone Brian Jones – described as a strong swimmer – drowned in his private swimming pool in 1969.

LEFT: Jimi Hendrix, from Seattle, became a guitar legend after moving to London in 1966, but died just four years later, choking after drinking and taking double-strength sleeping pills.

FACING PAGE, TOP: Kurt Cobain, leader of Seattle grunge band Nirvana, shot himself in 1994.

FACING, CENTRE: Jim Morrison's grave at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris is now a shrine to the Doors frontman, who died 40 years ago.



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some influence on him in later years, though this is pure speculation.

Since Cobain's death, which roughly coincided with the birth of the Internet, interest and debate about the 27 Club has increased immeasurably, leading to a deluge of articles and dedicated websites. While it may be true that people now actively seek out new additions to support the myth, this in itself presents a 'chicken and egg' scenario.

So, is there anything special about the number 27? Well, the short answer is yes, there is (though this is true of most numbers if you look hard enough). To begin with, 27 is the cube of 3 (total sum of 3x3x3), with 3 being the original 'Magic Number'. Much like its famous cousin 23 (see **FT23:32–35**, repr. **FT221:22–23; 175:23**), 27 is one of those numbers that recurs time and time again in nature and popular culture. For example, the Moon takes 27 days to orbit the Earth, the Sun revolves on its axis every 27 days, there are 27 bones in the human hand, and human outer skin cells are shed and re-grown every 27 days. The number also features prominently in various sections of the Bible. The 27 Project aims to collate instances of the number occurring in the world around us.[8]

The 27 Club is making steady inroads into popular culture, aided no end by a best-selling book by Eric Segalstad called *The 27s: The Greatest Myth of Rock & Roll* which weaves together the lives of 34 club members into a narrative[9] and a 2008 movie in which the surviving member of a rock band attempts to carry out his best friend and bandmate's last request after his suicide.[10] The number 27 has been used in the titles of tracks by Fallout Boy, Biffy Clyro, Lagwagon, Cartel and the Dave Mathews Band, while US parodist 'Weird' Al Yankovic is known to bury the number in his songs and videos and there is even a band from Boston simply called 27 – all of which reinforces the number's seemingly powerful association with music. FT

NOTES

1 The Dead, of course, have their own 'Curse of the Keyboard', which has seen off Pigpen, Keith Godchaux, Brent Mydland and Vince Welnick. Even Dead tribute band the Dark Star Orchestra lost their keyboardist while touring in 2005.

2 http://bit.ly/oU59IM (mediaexposed.tumblr.com).

3 http://tinyurl.com/448t2zk (seattlepi.com).

4 This may have been an unintentional side-effect of the original 78 RPM records being converted to the standard 33.3 RPM used for long-players.

5 http://imdb.to/Ro5kE (imdb).

6 http://tinyurl.com/3hsw9fd (BBC).

7 The Big Five being the then-most prominent members Johnson, Jones, Jimi (Hendrix), Janis (Joplin) and Jim (Morrison).

8 http://27project.wordpress.com/.

9 http://bit.ly/bVPipM (wikipedia).

10 http://www.the27clubmovie.com/.

FURTHER READING

http://www.forever27.co.uk/27/.

http://www.the27club.net/.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/27_(number).

THE 27 CLUB: THE LIST

(IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)

LOUIS CHAUVIN (Ragtime musician, died: 26 Mar 1908)
ROBERT JOHNSON (Blues guitarist/singer, 16 Aug 1938)
NAT JAFFE (Jazz pianist, 5 Aug 1945)
JESSE BELVIN (Rhythm & Blues singer, 6 Feb 1960)
RUDY LEWIS (the Drifters, 20 May 1964)
MALCOLM HALE (Spanky and Our Gang, 31 Oct 1968)
DICKIE PRIDE (Singer, 26 Mar 1969)
BRIAN JONES (Rolling Stones, 3 Jul 1969)
ALEXANDRA (Singer, 31 Jul 1969)
AL 'BLIND OWL' WILSON (Canned Heat, 3 Sept 1970)
JIMI HENDRIX (Guitarist/singer, 18 Sept 1970)
JANIS JOPLIN (Singer, 4 Oct 1970)
ARLESTER 'DYKE' CHRISTIAN (Dyke and the Blazers, 13 Mar 1971)
JIM MORRISON (Doors, 3 July 1971)
LINDA JONES (Soul singer, 14 Mar 1972)
LESLIE HARVEY (Stone the Crows, 3 May 1972)
RON 'PIGPEN' MCKERNAN (Grateful Dead, 8 Mar 1973)
ROGER LEE DURHAM (Bloodstone, 27 Jul 1973)
WALLACE YOHN (Chase, 12 Aug 1974)
DAVE ALEXANDER (the Stooges, 10 Feb 1975)
PETER HAM (Badfinger, 24 Apr 1975)
GARY THAIN (Uriah Heep, 8 Dec 1975)
CECILIA (Singer, 2 Aug 1976)
HELMUT KOLLEN (Triumvirat, 3 May 1977)
CHRIS BELL (Big Star, 27 Dec 1978)
D BOON (the Minutemen, 22 Dec 1985)
ALEXANDER BASHLACHEV (Musician, 17 Feb 1988)
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT (Gray, 12 Aug 1988)
PETE DE FREITAS (Echo & the Bunnymen, 14 Jun 1989)
MIA ZAPATA (the Gits, 7 Jul 1993)
KURT COBAIN (Nirvana, 5 Apr 1994)
KRISTEN PFAFF (Hole, 16 June 1994)
RICHEY EDWARDS (Manic Street Preachers, declared missing 1 Feb 1995, officially presumed dead 23 Nov 2008)
STRETCH (Rapper, 30 Nov 1995)
FAT PAT (Rapper, 3 Feb 1998)
FREAKY TAH (Lost Boyz, 28 Mar 1999)
RODRIGO BUENO (Singer, 24 Jun 2000)
SEAN PATRICK MCCABE (Ink & Dagger, 28 Aug 2000)
MARIA SERRANO (Passion Fruit, 24 Nov 2001)
JEREMY WARD (the Mars Volta, 25 May 2003)
BRYAN OTTOSON (American Head Charge, 19 Apr 2005)
VALENTIN ELIZALDE (singer, 26 Nov 2006)
ORISH GRINSTEAD (702, 20 Apr 2008)
LILY TEMBO (Musician, 14 Sept 2009)
AMY WINEHOUSE (Singer, 23 Jul 2011)

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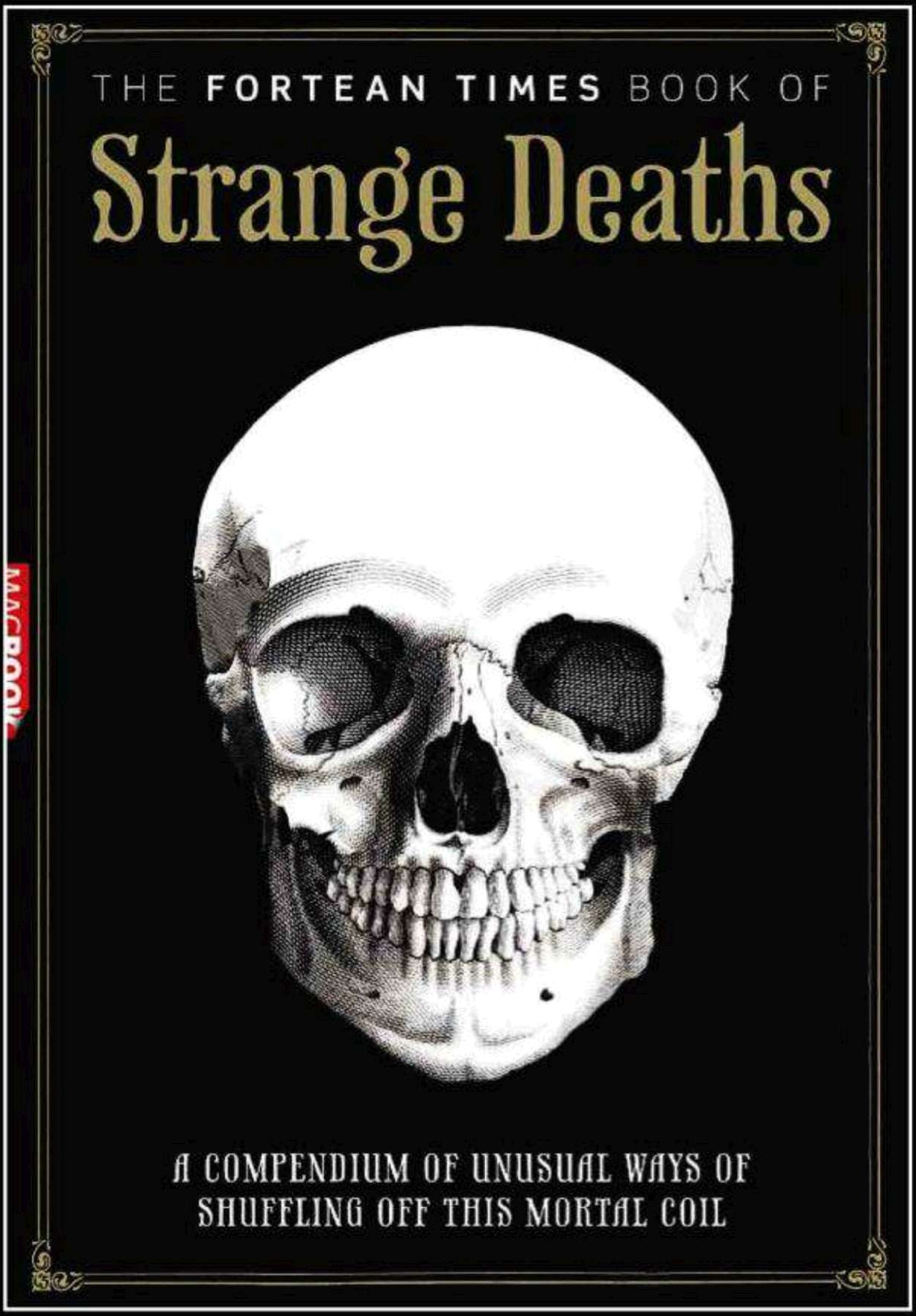
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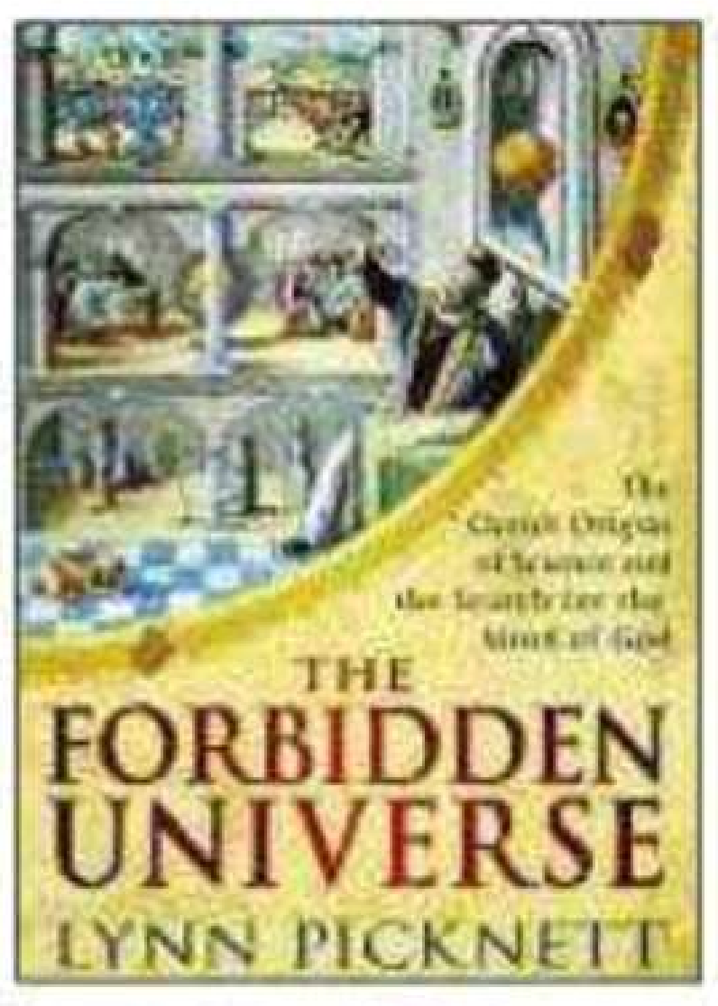
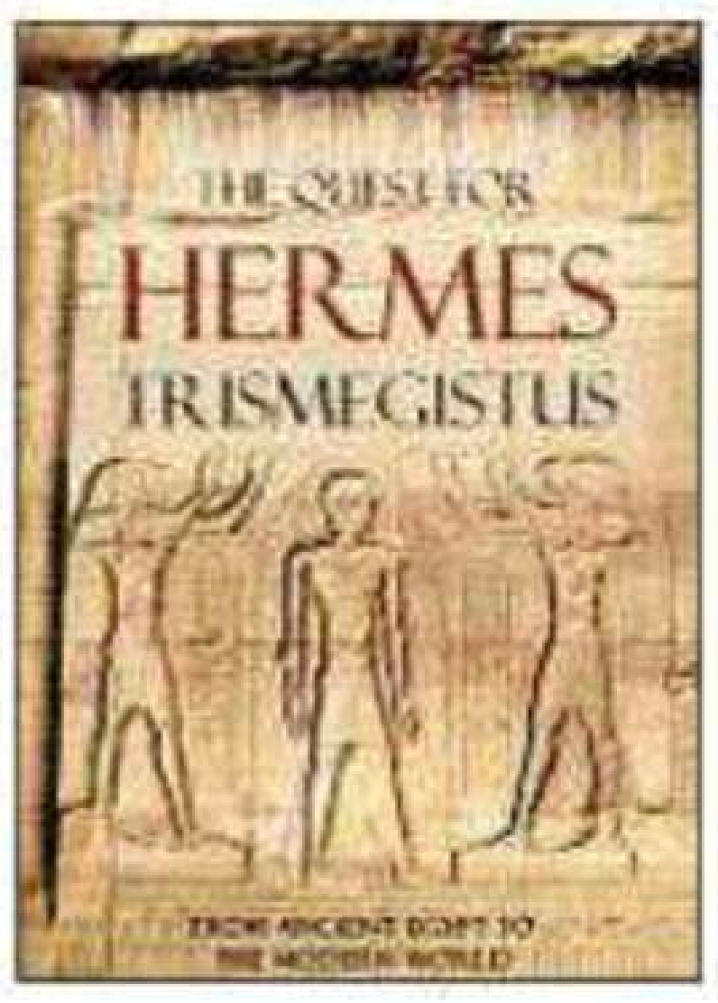
reviews

Histories of esoteric thinking

The more polemical of two books about Hermeticism recognises Frances Yates's Renaissance scholarship; the other looks at the spirituality of its teachings


The Occult Origins of Science and the Search for the Mind of God
THE FORBIDDEN UNIVERSE
LYNN PICKNETT



The Forbidden Universe

The Occult Origins of Science and the Search for the Mind of God

Lynn Picknett & Clive Prince

Constable 2011

Hb, 390pp, illus, notes, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9781849014090

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.09

The Quest for Hermes Trismegistus

From Ancient Egypt to the Modern World

Gary Lachman

Floris Books 2011

Pb, 247pp, notes, refs, ind, £16.99/$24.95, ISBN 9780863157981

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29

In a nice touch of synchronicity two good solid books on the Hermetic tradition have appeared at the same time. They overlap to some extent in their telling of the origins and history of Hermeticism, but otherwise tackle the subject in very different ways.

Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince are more polemical, especially in their inveighing against the "Dawkins/Hitchens school" of "scientific atheism"; Gary Lachman looks more at the spirituality of the Hermetic teachings.

Much of the main body of *The Forbidden Universe* – the origins of Hermetic philosophy and its reintroduction to Western European esoteric thinking in the 15th century – is dependent on the work of Dame Frances Yates, and rightly so; this book may bring her scholarship to an audience previously unacquainted with it.

Picknett and Prince cite Yates that the Renaissance resurgence in occult philosophy drew together Neo-Platonism, Kabbalah and Hermeticism, of which the third, they say, was "by far the most important strand".

"The sheer power of Hermeticism cannot be over-estimated. It effectively created the Renaissance," they write. They also argue that Hermeticism effectively created our modern scientific world.

It is clear that many scientists in the 17th and even into the 18th century were also in one way or another Hermeticists; the origin of the Royal Society in the lectures and discussions of "natural philosophers" at both Wadham College, Oxford, and Gresham College, London, in the mid-17th century is well established, and in recent years Isaac Newton's studies in astrology and the deeper recesses of the Bible have become well-known, no doubt to the discomfiture of today's scientists. It's indisputable that "modern science emerged from Hermeticism".

But they perhaps stretch the Hermetic influence on later scientists a little further than is comfortable, and in the last third of their book they argue for a Hermetic interpretation of much of modern science: "As science itself becomes more magical, Hermeticism's time has truly come."

"Gnosis concerns 'the true relations between man, the cosmos and the divine'"

Although this is clearly the culmination of their book, it feels the weakest part; Picknett and Prince are far better popular history writers than popular science writers, and I struggled to follow some of their arguments – and not because of the complexity of the science.

In a sentence, their thesis is that we live in a designer universe (not to be confused with the "intelligent design" of fundamentalist Christians): the combination of factors necessary for life to have developed is far beyond chance. "This universe emerges as being deliberately designed for a purpose in which intelligent life plays a crucial, if not the crucial, role," they write.

Whether the reader accepts this or not, ultimately Picknett and Prince are arguing that there is no need for a conflict between religion and science, and in a world of simplistic argument-by-assertion by fundamentalist Christians on one side and Dawkins and Co. on the other (Charles Fort must be spinning in his grave), this is a welcome message.

Hermeticism, Gary Lachman says in *The Quest for Hermes Trismegistus*, is active and interactive: "The Hermetic act seems to be one of connecting otherwise apparently disparate ideas, beliefs and visions, and producing some new vital current out of the encounter".

It is an eclectic tradition "aimed at asking questions, rather than one of having answers". The Hermetic way is "to bring together what is of value from both the esoteric undercurrent and the exoteric mainstream… to integrate them, so that something new and unforeseen may arise".

Early on he distinguishes usefully between normal knowledge (*episteme*) and deep spiritual knowledge (*gnosis*); the first is "the body of ideas arrived at through reason and experience", the second "immediate, direct, non-discursive cognition of reality". Gnosis, he says, concerns "the true relations between man, the cosmos and the divine".

He also distinguishes between Gnosticism and Hermeticism, though there are clear overlaps between the two, and much of Lachman's book could apply equally to both.

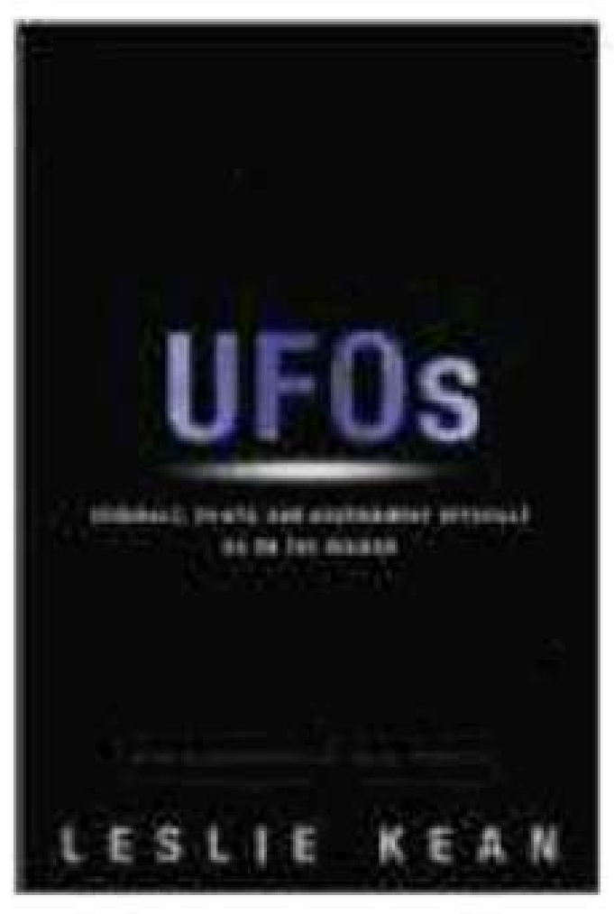
For example, he cites a number of writers on their experiences of sudden enlightenment, and concludes that such people are perceiving full reality; in contrast, normally our rational mind filters and greatly limits our awareness of what we see and hear, and of our knowledge and understanding.

"The point of gnosis, then, is not only to have the experience,

Continued on page 64

UFOs for the credulous

So a book slams the US government as being responsible for debunking UFOs and then suggests a government enquiry?



UFOs

Generals, Pilots and Government Officials Go on the Record

Leslie Kean

Harmony Books 2010
Casebound, xii+335pp, illus, notes, ind, $25.99/£25.99, ISBN 97803077166842

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £23.40

It's rare for me to fall asleep while reading a book of an afternoon, even after a rich lunch, but this one did it for me. Leslie Kean has been in the *New York Times* bestseller list with it, too, which gives one pause, and mild cause for concern.

So why review it now? Because it is so awful, and has probably misled its many American readers – *Fortean Times* readers deserve to know what to avoid – and it doesn't do what it says on its tin.

On the front of the dust jacket no less a person than Dr Michio Kaku, familiar to BBC4 viewers for his intriguing documentaries on science, tells us this is "at last a serious and thoughtful book… a treasure trove of insightful and eye-opening information… the gold standard for UFO research."

What bollocks.

Dr Kaku should know better. Either he didn't read the book or he knows nothing about ufology whatever, either of which would disqualify him from endorsing it.

What we get, in fact, is a more intelligent version of Nick Pope's revelation-free *Open Skies, Closed Minds* of many moons ago. We also get Mr Pope.

He adds to his portfolio of half-truths and tendentious contentions the claim that, when assembling the Condign Report, "we" at the Ministry of Defence invented the phrase "unidentified aerial phenomenon" (UAP) as a more useful, neutral term than 'UFO'. At least three veteran British ufologists might dispute that. Otherwise he rehearses his usual boilerplate: a confused and partial rendition of the 'Cosford incident', and a less than objective account of the Rendlesham Forest farrago.

Nowhere in the book is the alternative take on these cases even mentioned, let alone discussed. So it is with almost every one of the ufological events paraded in these pages, all of which have been exploded or explained elsewhere: the Belgian 'triangles' of the early Nineties (still more embarrassing are 'analyses' of the solitary photograph from this wave, now confirmed as a hoax), the 1976 Tehran case, 1981's Trans-en-Provence event, the Phoenix triangle(s) of 1997, and so on, while Messrs Penniston and Halt trot out their tricksy versions of what happened in Rendlesham Forest with nary a qualifying word.

The honourable exception is Captain Ray Bowyer, who does mention an independent assessment of his genuinely intriguing sighting of disc-shaped lights over the English Channel in 2007 – but only to dismiss one detail of it before pondering that "the day may be coming when the whole human race will have to face the frightening reality that we are coexistent with others in this universe."

It would be surprising, rather than frightening, if we weren't alone in the Universe. Ms Kean doesn't commit herself to the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH), but one senses that that is where her sympathies lie; and needless to say the ETH, and the flawed logic that makes it seem 'reasonable', isn't seriously questioned.

Instead we hear a quiet drip-drip-drip of elementary school-level ufology-for-believers – "all of us have long been exposed to an atmosphere of ridicule and the automatic dismissal of the UFO phenomenon", for example (Ms Kean should read a few opinion polls and tabloid 'newspapers'), or caricatures of science ("Why should we assume we already understand everything there is to know, in our infancy on this planet?") that reveal either a crude rhetorical strategy or a truly encyclopædic ignorance of the scale and depth of human enquiry.

But essentially this is a deeply boring book, entirely bereft of "insightful and eye-opening information", which I suppose is why it sent me to sleep.

Ms Kean's solution to all the factitious excitements she offers us is no less soporific: bring in the government and set up a new enquiry into UFOs. This sounds strange indeed – if you don't read the *New York Times*, or the *Guardian*, or dine often with the *bien-pensants* of the liberal establishment – coming from one who spends an entire chapter castigating the government as the root of UFO debunkery in America.

Logical then, isn't it, that they'll heed Ms Kean's call to spend money they don't have on a subject they finally dismissed more than four decades ago? And she may be amazed to learn that not all debunkers, on any side of the Atlantic, take their cue on UFOs or any other matter from government.

As a final irony, this book is a perfect example of one of UFO guru Stanton T Friedman's rules for debunkers: "What the public doesn't know, don't tell them."

Ms Kean certainly knows how to keep shtoom.

Peter Brookesmith

Fortean Times Verdict

ONE-SIDED PRESENTATION OF QUESTIONABLE EVIDENCE **0**

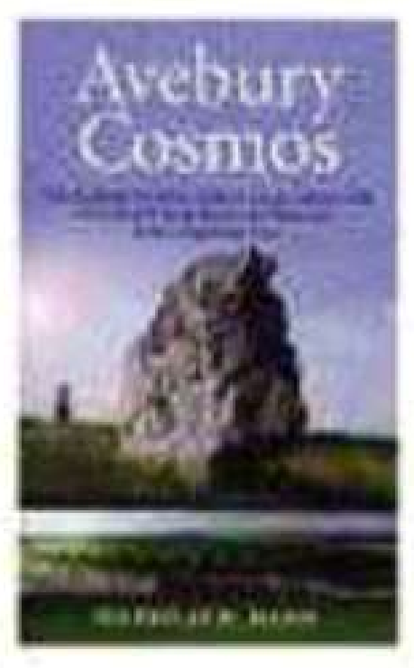
Avebury Cosmos

The Neolithic World of Avebury Henge, Silbury Hill, West Kennet Long Barrow, the Sanctuary & the Longstones Cove

Nicholas R Mann

O Books 2011
Pb, 369pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781846946806

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49



Archæoastronomy 'professionals' make few discoveries, preferring to bicker and slate everyone else's theories. Pioneers such as John North, Alexander Thom and Gerald Hawkins are reviled and their work dismissed. So archæoastronomers will no doubt have a field day tearing apart Nicholas Mann's book, which in my opinion is excellent. But I'm not an archæoastronomer.

With computer software, it is possible to see the night sky from any place on Earth at any point in history. *Avebury Cosmos* combines such 'desk-based research' with fieldwork, adding elements of anthropology and folklore. What emerges is a picture of how the people who built Avebury may have regarded their world, and those beyond it, as they affirmed their beliefs on a massive scale with constructions in earth and stone.

It has long been known that elements of the Avebury Complex have alignments to the motions of the Sun and Moon, which have changed little. The stars, though, have changed a great deal. As it spins, the Earth wobbles on its axis like a gyroscope; this results in 'precession' – the stars appear to move very slowly around us in a great circle. It takes 75 years for the stars to move by one degree; to the builders of Avebury that would have represented three generations, yet it seems that precession was noticed and may have been encoded in the monuments.

Avebury Cosmos takes us back to when stars now seen only in the southern hemisphere were visible from Britain: a group which includes the Southern Cross would have risen in the south.

But due to precession, stars that had been visible, and probably revered since the Ice Age, fell from view; for a time the

Milky Way was seen to circle the entire horizon on winter nights. Mann argues that the monument builders were impressed enough to incorporate it in the design of Avebury. This book's novel ideas are well-argued and honestly presented as theory rather than fact. Archæoastronomy is complex, but Mann's book goes much further towards explaining it than anything I have read.

Steve Marshall

Fortean Times Verdict
FASCINATING AND DEEPLY WEIRD SCIENCE, WELL WRITTEN **8**

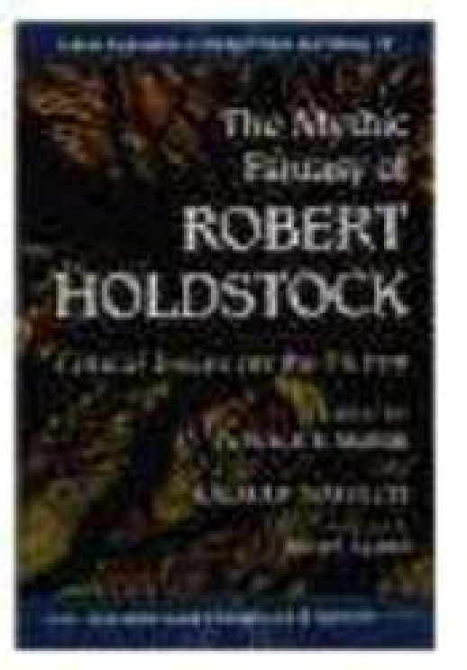
The Mythic Fantasy of Robert Holdstock

Critical Essays on the Fiction

Eds: Donald E Morse & Kalman Matolcsy

McFarland & Co Inc
Pb, 202pp, notes, ref, bib, ind, £30.50, ISBN 9780786449422

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £30.50



Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* cycle is one of the best-loved fantasy series in English.

This collection of essays on his writing, which was begun while he was alive and completed after his death in 2009, explores issues such as the occurrence of the sublime in the *Mythago Wood* series, the role of the female in *Lavondyss* and the spatiotemporal structure of Ryhope Wood.

The studies are in-depth and insightful; for example, Senior states, "While Holdstock observes many of the standard stages of the monomyth or quest structure of genre fiction, he alters them, often radically. In particular, he omits the final stage which Joseph Campbell calls the 'return and reintegration into society'."

Sawyer's study of Holdstock's earlier science fiction shows how elements underlying his later work start to emerge.

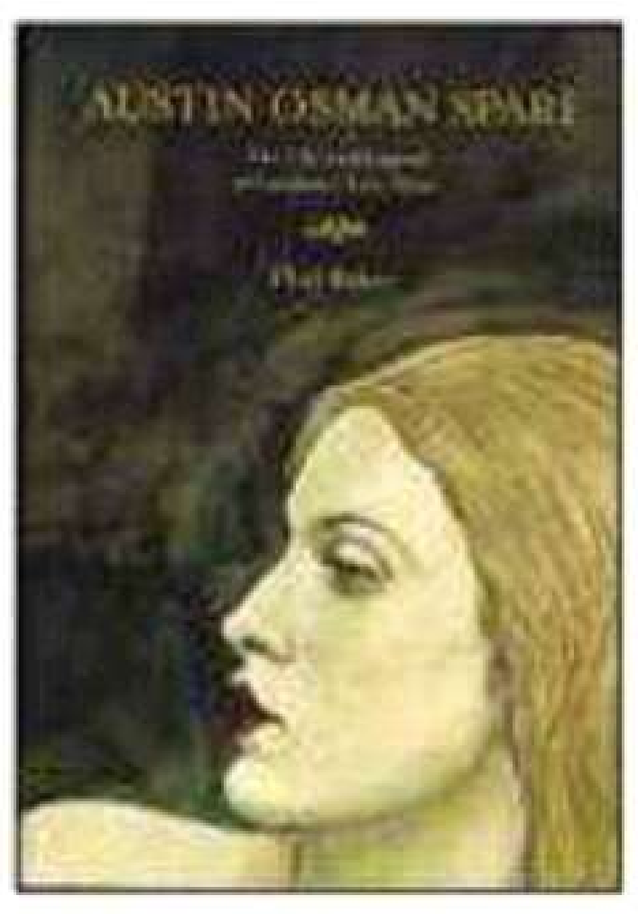
If you haven't read the *Mythago Wood* cycle, then you can look forward to some of the most original fantasy novels of the 20th century, and to this perceptive volume of essays.

Stephen Toase

Fortean Times Verdict
A TREAT IF YOU'RE A FAN, AND INTERESTING EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT **8**

The occult(ed) artist

A wealth of detail fleshes out the often obscured life of a visionary and esoteric artist – and the book itself is a treat too



Austin Osman Spare

The Life and Legend of London's Lost Artist

Phil Baker

Strange Attractor Press 2011
Hb, 322pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £25.00, ISBN 9781907222016

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.50

Spare's reputation is curiously oblique, and fully deserves Phil Baker's sub-title. I left my review copy where visitors could see it: a couple of practising artists saw it, and were intrigued, mainly because they had never heard of him; a couple of people who practise chaos magic saw it and told me how influential Spare was for them – including attributing to him themes from chaos magic which did not come from him, and only developed years after his death. He is, properly speaking, occulted; his name is invoked like one of his sigils, but he is never directly there.

Austin Osman Spare lived exactly his allotted biblical whack, a strange obeisance for a man who came to see religion, and especially faith, as the fundamental barrier to spiritual maturity. And the trajectory of his life was wayward at best; fame found him early (as I read the first part of this book I was continually reminded of HD's reflection on herself in *Her*: "a mind too early sharpened") but somehow never stuck. The relative poverty and obscurity of his later life seems to have been painful and fruitful in equal measure; he was a prolific painter right up until his death, and was talking about new work on his deathbed.

Phil Baker has written an elegant and comprehensive biography, and his deep sympathy for his subject is nicely tempered by his scepticism towards some of Spare's sources of esoteric thought. There is a wealth of detail here (there needs to be; Spare packed a good deal of living into his life) and I came away with a new and different picture of Spare in my head; a much more socially involved person, with an oceanic spread of interests and talents. I'm happy that my picture of Spare the rainmaker is still valid – I've always liked that about him.

The centrality of sex (or to put it in a Žižekian way, the "sexualisation of everything") in Spare's life and thought is a major theme of the book and, while I knew of the place of the erotic in his conceptual world, I hadn't realised that Spare produced erotica (EM Forster owned some of Spare's more hardcore material, which he no doubt referred to as 'smut'). Baker has put real flesh onto the darkly ethereal eroticism of Spare's more public art – in more ways than one; I had always thought of Spare as being at one remove from real physicality, but Baker's investigation of his fulsome, and fulsomely weird, sexual odyssey left me in no doubt the artist was practising in every sense.

I was less convinced by the comparison with Blake, made by Baker and by Alan Moore in the foreword. First, Blake's vision is so different from Spare's; Peter Riley's line – "a nation is the logarithm of its love" – would have chimed with Blake, but would, I suspect, have appalled Spare. Blake is the personification of the outsider artist; Spare is an artist who sees himself as an outsider. They are equally, if diversely, eccentric; but that doesn't make them alike. I much prefer Peter Ackroyd's characterisation of Spare as an example of the "Cockney visionary tradition", with the caveat that Spare's œuvre is so intensely individual and individualistic as to require a very particular definition of 'visionary'.

Spare's posthumous ascent into the pantheon of English magic (and magick) is dealt with briefly. Since Baker is concerned with Spare's life, and there is already a good deal of material around about Spare and magic (much of it frankly mythological), this doesn't undermine the book's real quality; but I found that, after such a beautifully fleshed-out picture of Spare the man, I hankered after a little more about Spare the mythical magus. Volume two?

For those dinosaurs among us who still treasure books for their physical qualities, this publication is a rare treat. It is beautifully designed throughout; the elegant cover is matched by the quality of the illustrations and plates; typography and page design are exemplary; the book has been well edited, and the annotations are excellent. Pretty much everyone who came into our living room headed straight for our copy and picked it up. If quality had anything to do with it, this would be a bestseller.

Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict
A STUNNING TRIBUTE TO AN UNJUSTLY NEGLECTED ARTIST **9**

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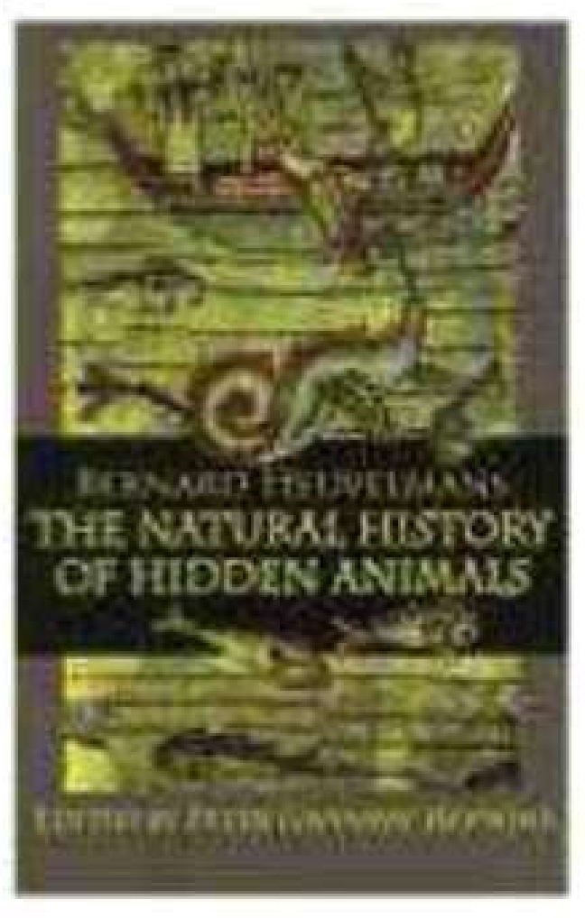
A bit steep

A hefty price tag and outdated content does the late crypto author no favours



The Natural History of Hidden Animals

Bernard Heuvelmans

Kegan Paul 2007
Hb, 145pp, illus, ind, £750.00, ISBN 9780710313331
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £75.00

I owe my interest in cryptozoology to Dr Bernard Heuvelmans's *On the Track of Unknown Animals* (1958) and until this one, have not been disappointed by any of his books. This slim hardback – 145 pages, inadequate index and no bibliography – has a price tag of £75, yet is little more than a rehash of old writings about the history of cryptozoology and the discovery of animals now looked upon as cryptozoological triumphs. It may interest newcomers, but there will be little new information for anyone else.

The chapters on major new and rediscovered animals focus upon examples drawn from mediæval times to the okapi's debut in 1901. Where are the 20th century's later successes? In my own book, *The New Zoo* (2002), that's where. One exception is the 1960s Minnesota Iceman, which Heuvelmans named *Homo pongoides*. There is little doubt that this supposed cadaver of an Neanderthaloid hominid was a fake.

And where in the chapter dealing with the most eminent and influential scientists, explorers and writers in the field of cryptozoology are the modern-day figures? You will search in vain for Loren Coleman, Mark Chorvinsky, Grover Krantz, Bill Gibbons, Tim Dinsdale, Michel Raynal, John MacKinnon, Paul LeBlond, Chad Arment, Colin Groves, Paul Cropper and (dare I say it?) yours truly. The impression is of a tome and outlook as fossilised as the beasts portrayed in it.

Cryptozoology is ongoing. Would it have been too much to ask for the book either to have been flagged as a compilation that had not been updated so as to preserve its historical context; or for footnotes or an epilogue to drag the content into a contemporary context?

A similar problem arises with the taxonomic terminology. Rhynchocephalia as a reptile order was abandoned years ago (having been split into the unrelated orders of Rhynchosauria and Sphenodontia), and as for referring to the crocodiles as Loricata, well… These terms may have been correct when some of this material was written, but today are simply confusing. There are also problems with the palæontological and zoological content. *Latimeria chalumnæ* is no longer the only surviving cœlacanth species, and *Platasterias latiradiata* is no longer deemed to be a surviving somasteroid. Both facts were known before this book was published. Was the manuscript not given to a zoologist?

At the very least, there should have been footnotes. The French terms and colloquialisms – and the idiosyncratic translations of animal names from Heuvelmans's native French – become tedious rather than quaint.

Somewhere in here, an authoritative insight into the birth and growth of cryptozoology may be yearning to break free. Heuvelmans may have earned his reputation as an author who refused to allow his works to be edited, but he deserved better than this.

Karl Shuker

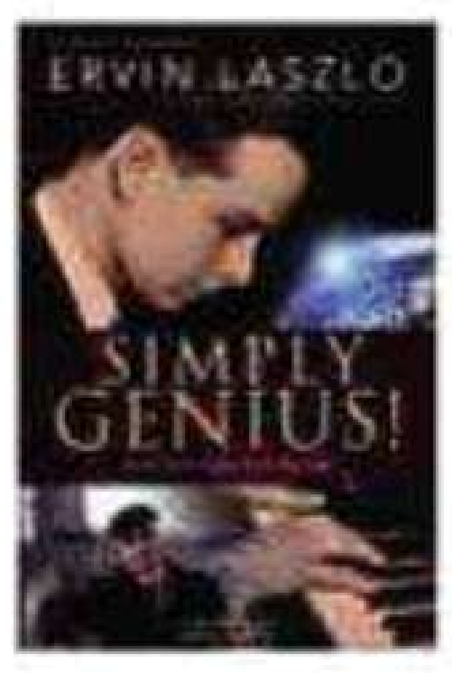
Fortean Times Verdict
THERE MAY BE BETTER WAYS TO SPEND HARD-EARNED CASH… **2**

Simply Genius!

And other tales from my life

Ervin Laszlo

Hay House 2011
Pb, 283pp, illus, £10.99, ISBN 9781848503373
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £9.89



Ervin Laszlo's autobiography could fill several volumes. Born in Budapest in 1932 to a "passionate music lover" mother and a law-school graduate father who managed the family's shoe factory, Laszlo "had a happy childhood". He débuted with the Budapest Symphony Orchestra just before his 10th birthday, and survived the Nazi occupation and Red Army siege.

In 1959, despite a successful career as a concert pianist, Laszlo had an "epiphany" in the Bavarian Alps and felt he had to discover "things… that weren't evident in the context of everyday life, yet were real and important". Years before, his uncle Pippa – another talented musician, who rather than manage the factory wrote treatises on Nietzsche and Freud – had sowed the seeds of Laszlo's second career as an academic philosopher. In prestigious universities in Europe and the US, Laszlo forged a reputation in Value Inquiry and Systems Philosophy. Between 1973 and 1991, he worked for the UN.

More recently, Laszlo focused on what he sees as an imminent "global bifurcation" (WorldShift) that encompasses, inter alia, 2012 prophecies, population growth, climate change and the solar cycle. He also studies the Akashic field – a "nonlocal in-formation field that pervades time and space". Laszlo argues that our "highly informed universe" arose from and is interconnected by "the rediscovered Akashic field of the wisdom traditions". Whether or not you accept the WorldShift or Akashic fields, *Simply Genius* is the thought-provoking and at times moving story of a humane, empathic and – literally and intellectually – courageous man.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict
MEMOIR OF A SERIAL OVER-ACHIEVER AND DECENT PERSON **8**

Continued from page 61

but to communicate it, and by doing so, to add to our understanding of ourselves and the cosmos, an understanding that Nous, God, or whoever, wants and is engaged in acquiring through us."

Picknett and Prince make similar points: we affect the Universe by observing it, and "the relationship between our consciousness and the universe is becoming more and more interdependent".

Their book is generally the easier read; Lachman's at times is quite a deep study of the philosophy and psychology of esoteric spirituality. But the two complement each other well.

Both books stress that while the teachings ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus are usually thought of as Greek–Egyptian, they are actually much older and Egyptian in origin, pre-dating the Greek occupation of and influence on Egypt.

Both also discuss the role of Isaac Casaubon, who famously poured cold water over Hermeticism in the early 17th century by demonstrating that the *Corpus Hermeticum* did not date back to ancient times but was actually written some time in the first four centuries AD.

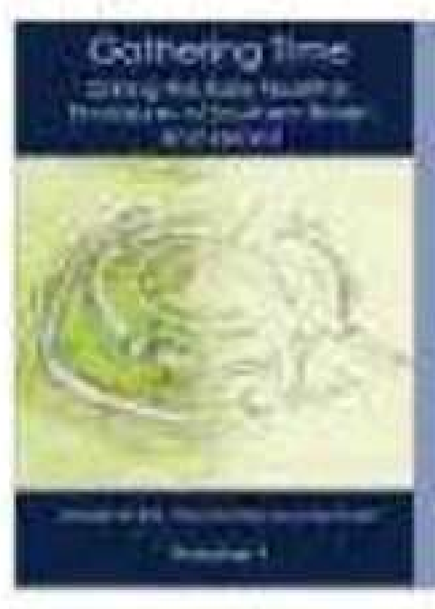
Picknett and Prince argue that Casaubon was simply wrong; but Lachman raises an intriguing possibility.

Casaubon published his dismissal of the ancient origins of the Hermetic texts in 1614 – and in 1614 the first of the Rosicrucian manifestos appeared.

Hermetic philosophy – occult teaching – had been dismissed, and so went underground, starting a whole new esoteric chapter.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
THE FORBIDDEN UNIVERSE: GOOD HISTORICAL OVERVIEW **8**
THE QUEST: FINE EXPLORATION OF HERMETIC SPIRITUALITY **8**



The review of *Gathering Time* in the last issue was by Steve Marshall. Apologies to Steve.

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

GENES, GIANTS MONSTERS AND MEN

Joseph P Farrell

Feral House (feralhouse.com) 2011
Pb, pp245, bib, illus, £14.99
ISBN 9781936239085

Consider for a moment that what generations of our best scholars have told us about human history is wrong. Consider instead that human history, and the evolution of its genetic makeup, has been instigated and manipulated by "an elite, highly intelligent race" from "a planet occupied by tyrannical giants". The blurb calls Farrell's theory "plausible" – but that means throwing away an awful lot of 'conventional' wisdom simply on a yearning for something 'more exciting'. Certainly, the author has been building his case with three previous books (*The Cosmic War*, *The Philosopher's Stone*, and *Babylon's Banksters*), and with copious footnotes and references. It is bound to impress, but on closer examination it seems to be highly self-referential, and heavily reliant upon the New Age reinterpretation of history and the anti-establishment anxieties of those fascinated by stories of mind-control experiments. Farrell writes clearly and confidently but, as usual, we urge caution before belief. It may read more like a Dan Brownesque novel – complete with the expected touchstones of Nazis, Sumerian gods, secret societies, and bonkers inventors – but nevertheless Farrell asks some important questions along the way and includes interesting nuggets of fortean data about giants and relics of ancient civilisations.

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES: THE REST OF THE STORY

PMH Atwater

Hampton Roads Publishing (hrpub.com) 2011
Pb, pp278, index, notes, £16.99
ISBN 9781571746511

In the 1970s, Atwater 'died' three times, but survived with vivid memories of her near-death experiences (NDE). They changed her outlook profoundly, she says, and she has ever since researched the subject, worked with published 'experts', and become one herself. Yes, critics regard the glut of NDE books with suspicion, but among the New Agey dross are some, like this one, completely worthy of consideration. The sincerity of the author's conviction that we survive physical death is beyond doubt, but what impresses is her even-handedness in dealing with the narratives of survivors, the cases she and other investigators have gathered, the medical and psycho-social data, and the arguments of both promoters and sceptics. This results in an interesting analysis of the phenomenon, with a focus on how it has affected survivors. It is a good addition to the best writing on the subject; a calm and considered personal statement that is convincing and readable.

LUCID DREAMING

Paul & Charla Devereux

Daily Grail Publishing (dailygrail.com) 2011
Pb, pp203, index, bib, illus, £8.99
ISBN 9780980711158

Many of us have woken from sleep with the memory, possibly fading fast, of having been conscious during a dream. In a nutshell, that is what lucid dreaming is. There are some people, however, who seem to have a great degree of control during that conscious period and report wonderful things. All five senses can be active; gravity and distance can be defied by levitation, flight and teleportation; and all manner of entities can be encountered, including the dead. No wonder the authors, veteran explorers of consciousness research, claim here that if you can attain that conscious control the experiences can be better than 3D TV or any immersive virtual programme. With that in mind, they discuss dreaming and out-of-body experiences in some detail and how you can train yourself and what you might be able to do. Be warned, though, that it may take many years and gallons of patience – and even then it may be nothing like *Inception*. This book is only available to order online.

MONSTERS OF WISCONSIN

Linda S Godfrey

Stackpole Books (stackpolebooks.com) 2011.
Pb, pp137, bib, $12.95.
ISBN 9780811707480

Godfrey is a resident of Wisconsin and has, over many years, pursued local stories of strange happenings, hauntings, encounters with weird creatures and entities. This distillation covers goat men, werewolves, lizard men, lake monsters and miscellaneous out-of-place creatures and unidentified cryptids. Well written without the usual breathlessness, it's a useful addition to the genre.

FLYING SNAKE

Flying Snake Press (www.flyingsnakepress.co.uk)
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Flying Snake Press, 112 High Street, Macclesfield,
Cheshire, SK11 7QQ, UK.

New periodicals within our broad remit are as rare as sightings of flying snakes... Oh look! Here's one! Let's welcome this new journal dedicated to the intersection of forteana with cryptozoology and folklore, edited and published by Richard Muirhead, a veteran of these subjects. The first issue carries articles on pink-tusked elephants in China, giant centipedes in Hong Kong, a Dorset wild cat, an Israeli mermaid, the Nandi bear, flying lizards and Ezekiel's Chariot (but this seems to be a flyer for a 'Christian ufology' site!).

FORTEAN FICTION

BY LIGHT ALONE
ADAM ROBERTS

By Light Alone

Adam Roberts

Gollancz, 2011
Hb, pp416, £18.99
ISBN 9780575083646

By Light Alone is one of those books in which the author has concerns about modern society and extrapolates from these to create a world in which all his worst fears have come to pass: a warning to us all to change our ways.

On Roberts's future Earth, a bug has been invented which allows people to feed by absorbing the energy of sunlight through their hair. Unfortunately, rather than saving mankind from the conflict between a growing population and dwindling resources, it has exaggerated the class divide: the rich wear their hair short and eat food to show off; the poor loll in the sun all day. As the book opens, our narrator is George, a rich but disaffected man whose daughter is kidnapped; the story is then taken up by a girl who seems to be George's rescued daughter, then by his ex-wife, and finally by his real daughter, who has been swept up in the longhair revolution.

Neither Roberts's worries nor his expression of those worries could be considered sophisticated. He offers up simplistic takes on racism, class antagonism, and the alienating effects of technology; his notion of sexual politics is more interesting, if ultimately unconvincing. The crudeness of his moralising is not helped by the fact that the characters he uses as vehicles are, for the most part, unpleasant: George's numbness is tedious; the ex-wife is a neurotic loon. *By Light Alone* only really takes off in its final third. When George's daughter assumes the narration, the action gathers place and, clearly more sympathetic to this character, Roberts's style relaxes and finds a new fluidity, a beauty of phrase and metaphor. Finally, the story takes over and the ideas come alive.

Jen Ogilvie

.net WorldMags

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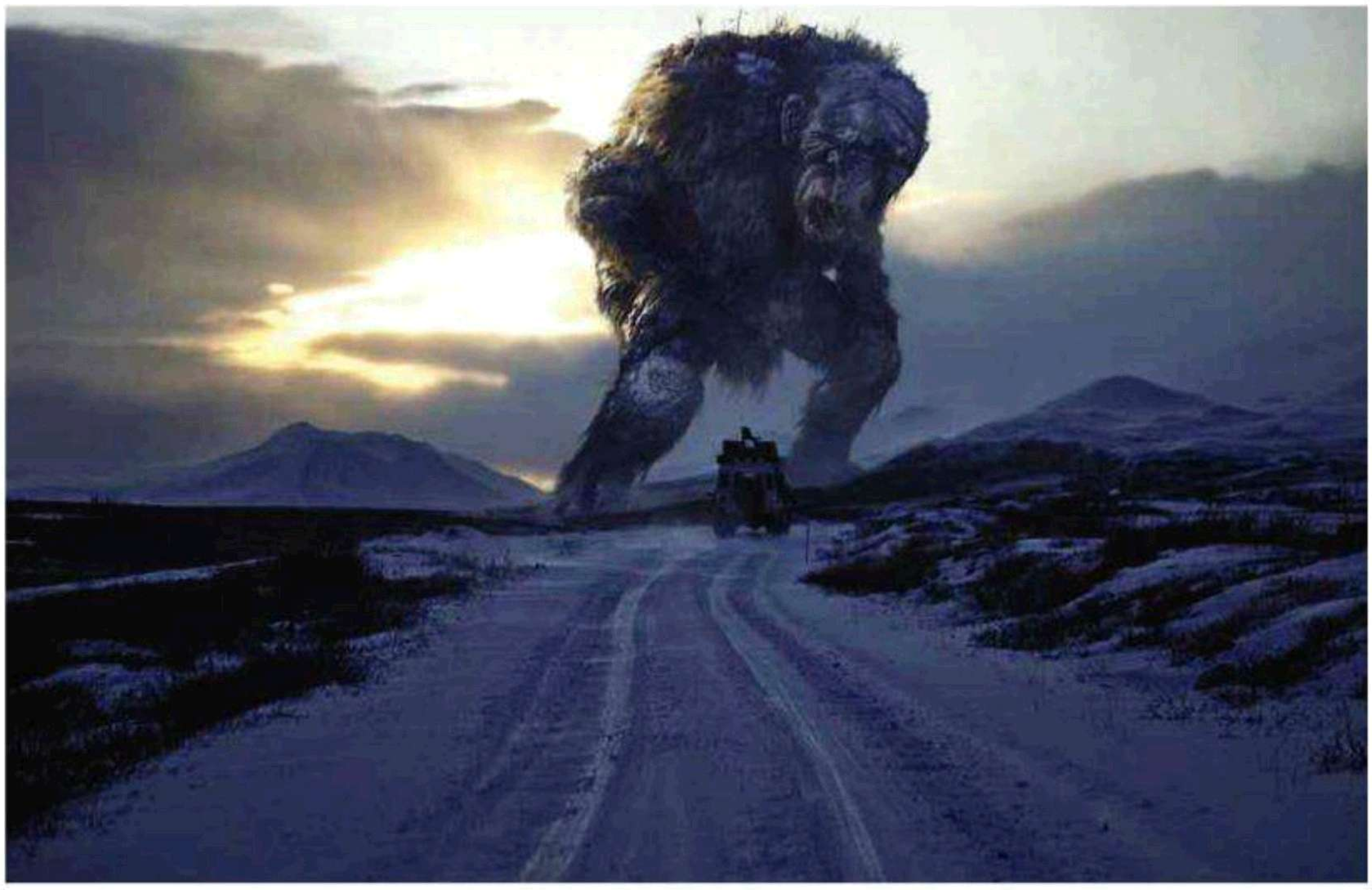


Troll Hunter

Dir André Øvredal, Norway 2011

On UK release from 9 September

Even when you've have heard a lot of promising things about a film, you simply don't know what to expect. It can leave you feeling deeply disappointed or simply walking away with shoulder-shrugging indifference. Or it can turn out to be an absolute cinematic joy. *Troll Hunter* falls into the last category. It has a simple premise: a group of young guerrilla film students set off to find an elusive hunter who, it seems, is killing all the rogue bears in the Norwegian mountains, to the chagrin of the licensed hunters in the area. When the students eventually track him down and follow him into the woods one night, the truth of his profession proves far more fantastical and terrifying than the students could ever imagine. When "TROOOOOOOOOLL!" is bellowed at them from deep within the murky midnight woods (and at us from out of the screen) by the titular 'Troll Hunter' (an excellent performance from Otto Jespersen, utterly believable as a grizzled, gnomic, world-weary but masterly wilderness man) the film never lets up, each encounter with creatures supposed to exist only in Norwegian folklore more gobsmacking and dangerous than the last.

The vérité style employed by director André Øvredal has no more an air of verisimilitude than either *The Blair Witch Project* or *Paranormal Activity*, but crucially it exists perfectly comfortably and believably within the bounds of its own reality. The landscapes are captivating, with journeys by road up and into the misty, rain-drenched mountains of Norway in search of the next troll encounter and finally to a snow-capped, wind scarred peak at the film's magnificent climax. There is no growing rift between the protagonists of *Troll Hunter* of the kind that was so vital in giving *Blair Witch* an edge to offset the otherwise endless trudging about the woods. It's the inhospitable environment which provides the edge in *Troll Hunter* and it is presented to us with considerable atmospheric flair. Add to this a government cover-up and a bunch of young film makers who become increasingly more of a dangerous nuisance than they are aware and the mixture of volatile elements is satisfyingly rendered.

Trolls, according to lore, can sniff out Christian believers, but if you are of the pagan persuasion, it seems, you might just be spared being eaten. *Troll Hunter* is by turns jocular and unsettling, driven by an absorbing, wordless visual narrative for much of its running time, punctuated by sudden, shocking events and awe-inspiring visuals. Nothing in the recent *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* – for all its multi-million dollar mega-budget CGI – can match the sight of the troll hunter squaring up to a 200ft (60m)-high troll at the film's awesome climax as the creature appears over a snow-blasted horizon. For once, an overused and much abused phrase is entirely apt: jaw-dropping. Absolutely jaw-dropping.

There are already rumours of a sequel and – pagan gods forbid – a US remake. Some films are so brilliantly simple in their conception and simply brilliant in their execution that they should be left alone. I'm still up on that snow-blasted, wind-scarred mountain summit, squaring up to a gigantic troll, and there ain't nothing going to top that. My film of the year so far. "TROOOOOOOOOLL!"

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict

A FABULOUS MOUNTAIN KING OF A MONSTER MOVIE **9**

Kill List

Dir Ben Wheatley, UK 2011

On UK release from 2 September

For the first two thirds of its duration, *Kill List* is a blood-curdling, kitchen sink thriller about a duo of British hitmen leaving a trail of gruesome slaughter across nondescript urban Sheffield landscapes and soulless ring-road travel lodges. It's chillingly believable. The portrayal of two former soldiers, Jay (Neil Maskell) and Gal (Michael Smiley), hardened and desensitised by their experiences in Iraq and expressing their brotherly love by beating each other up, is a gritty one. Times are hard for Jay, and with a wife and son to feed, he is persuaded by Gal to take on just one more contract – the 'Kill List' of the title. A nervy meeting with their sinister paymasters done and dusted, the pair set out on their bloody path. But Jay has issues – issues he plays out through the sadistically prolonged torture of people on the list. To hear film reviewers groaning with revulsion rather than derision is always a good thing in a screening room, and there are opportunities aplenty for revolted groaning in *Kill List*.

Much debate has taken place about which genre director Ben Wheatley's film falls into, but he has made it clear that it is horror, not a *Gangster No 1* nasty. The handbrake turn in which *Get Carter* meets *The Wicker Man* in the film's last third has all the elements of horror, but it is never more horrifying than what has, in the realms of stark believability, preceded it.

The horror of the film's climax, with a shocking denouément startlingly similar to that of *A Serbian Film* (which also, in its own way, is a study of a man pushed beyond the brink to provide for his family in harsh economic times) remains problematic for me; as frightening and as thrilling as it is, it never manages to erase the implacable, visceral, gut-churning reality of the events which have gone before.

There are obscure Arthurian references in the film, with Gal's mysterious girlfriend (almost a ringer for Maenad Maryann in *True Blood*) appearing intermittently – are these moments Jay's hallucinatory imaginings or sinister reality? But if there is some sort of twisted Grail allegory here, it escaped me. To be fair to the film, there are plenty of cryptic threads woven through it; I was just not quite convinced by the end that they all knitted together. Nevertheless, *Kill List* is an impressive piece of British film-making made on a miniscule budget leaving you reeling after the credits roll.

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict

CHILLING – DESERVES TO MAKE A BOX-OFFICE KILLING **8**

Attack the Block

Dir Joe Comish, UK 2011

Optimum Home Entertainment, £24.99/£19.99

You'd have thought that a film about aliens invading a South London council estate on Fireworks Night would offer all sorts of opportunities for absurdist comedy and/or wicked satire. *Attack the Block*, though, simply stages a straightforward confrontation between its hoodie heroes and its things from outer space, with some crude humour thrown in. The result is disappointing; a horror-comedy that lacks both bite and wit, so anodyne at times that it feels as if it's been plucked from the schedules of CBeebies (although it's undeniably swearier and bloodier, and has a nice little role for Nick Frost as the neighbourhood weed dealer).

Apart from not being very funny and not being very scary, the film is hobbled by two other major problems that it never quite recovers from. The first lies with its main characters. I watched the film days before the recent riots that shook London and other parts of the country, and even then it was hard to muster much interest or sympathy for these violent teenage hoodlums. Perhaps it's just me, but given that the first things we see this gang of hoodie-sporting thugs do is mug a nurse at knifepoint and then beat an alien creature to death, I doubt many other viewers will warm to them much either. I spent the first half of the film actively cheering on their imminent comeuppance at the claws of the space things.

The second problem is that the latter – shaggy, black wolf-gorilla things with no eyes but attractively illuminated jaws – are about as menacing as the Honey Monster. During the film's climactic scene, the other half walked in and exclaimed: "Oh, they're so cute!" (She also recently informed me in hushed tones that "they've banned *Hungry Caterpillar 2*", but you can trust her on this one).

I suppose one can take some comfort in the explicit moral of the piece, as banged painfully into the thick skull of 15-year-old black gang leader Moses (yes, he will indeed lead his people to freedom, although he won't taste it himself): actions have consequences. Actually, this needs to be qualified a bit: If you mug a defenceless nurse, the chances are you'll get away with it; but if you whack a female alien monster, her homeys will come and merk you, and that rather speedily (yes, I had to look up 'merk' on urbandictionary.com).

There's another life-lesson (or political gesture) here too, which the second half of the film spells out at length: that victims will forgive their attackers if faced with a common and greater threat – like aliens, or Evil Tory Cuts, perhaps. That's what the nurse (a sort of proxy for white, *Guardian*-reading, middle class viewers wondering what on Earth their kids are watching) does. She turns out to live on the same "shitty council estate" as her muggers. We're all in it together, then – black, white, NHS key workers, teenage gang members, poor little Charlie Gilmore and Uncle Tom Cobley and all.

It's an idea embodied in the image of Moses dangling precariously from a Union Jack at the film's end, after he's saved the world, and before he's been carted off by the 'feds' (I know, I know, this isn't the US, and what's wrong with Filth, Plod or Old Bill? Perhaps David Starkey should have a word with these feckless young purveyors of gangsta-speak). "They always arrest the wrong people," opines one block resident, but after recent events I'm not so sure that even the residents of Tottenham or Hackney would agree, let alone 'angry of Tunbridge Wells'.

To his credit, first-time director Joe Cornish (of 'Adam and Joe' fame) elicits good performances from his youthful cast, has a nice feel for his Sarf London locations and, with cinematographer Thomas Townend, delivers a film that's, visually speaking, full of colour and fizz, with some nice action scenes.

There's a scene toward the film's end – in which we see a child's Spider-man duvet on Moses's bed – that is both subtly chilling and rather touching, suggesting an uncomfortable truth about these kids' lives. It's too little, too late, and too clunky, perhaps, but it adds a momentary flash of illumination that *almost* made me forgive much of what had come before.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

HOODIE-HUGGING HORROR ROMP IS A MORAL MUDDLE **5**

SHORTS

WRECKAGE

(Chelsea Films, £12.99)

"The Spare Parts may be your own…"

And I, for one, am quite happy at this point to donate my body to science (or McDonalds), having lost the will to live. Four teenagers (in actuality, dreadful 'thirty-something', no-mark actors) break down on a deserted country road and go searching for a spare fan belt in a deserted auto scrap yard… where an escaped serial killer happens to be hanging out. So far, so predictable and the one fresh angle this film could have utilised was its unique setting for some inventive and gruesome deaths. But no, victims are dispatched in a pedestrian manner, usually either shot or stabbed, which really isn't why people watch these films. (In all fairness, someone does get a car dropped on their head, which comes as welcome light relief.) The acting is appalling, as the cast stand around, scratch their heads with guns and wait to speak their lines. I'll leave you, as the film does, with the final exchange between surviving hero and killer (and what would make a fine imaginary exchange between myself and director, John Mallory Asher):

"Why the f**k did you do it?"

"Why not?"

Tim Weinberg **3/10**

SCREAM OF THE BANSHEE

(G2 Pictures, £14.99)

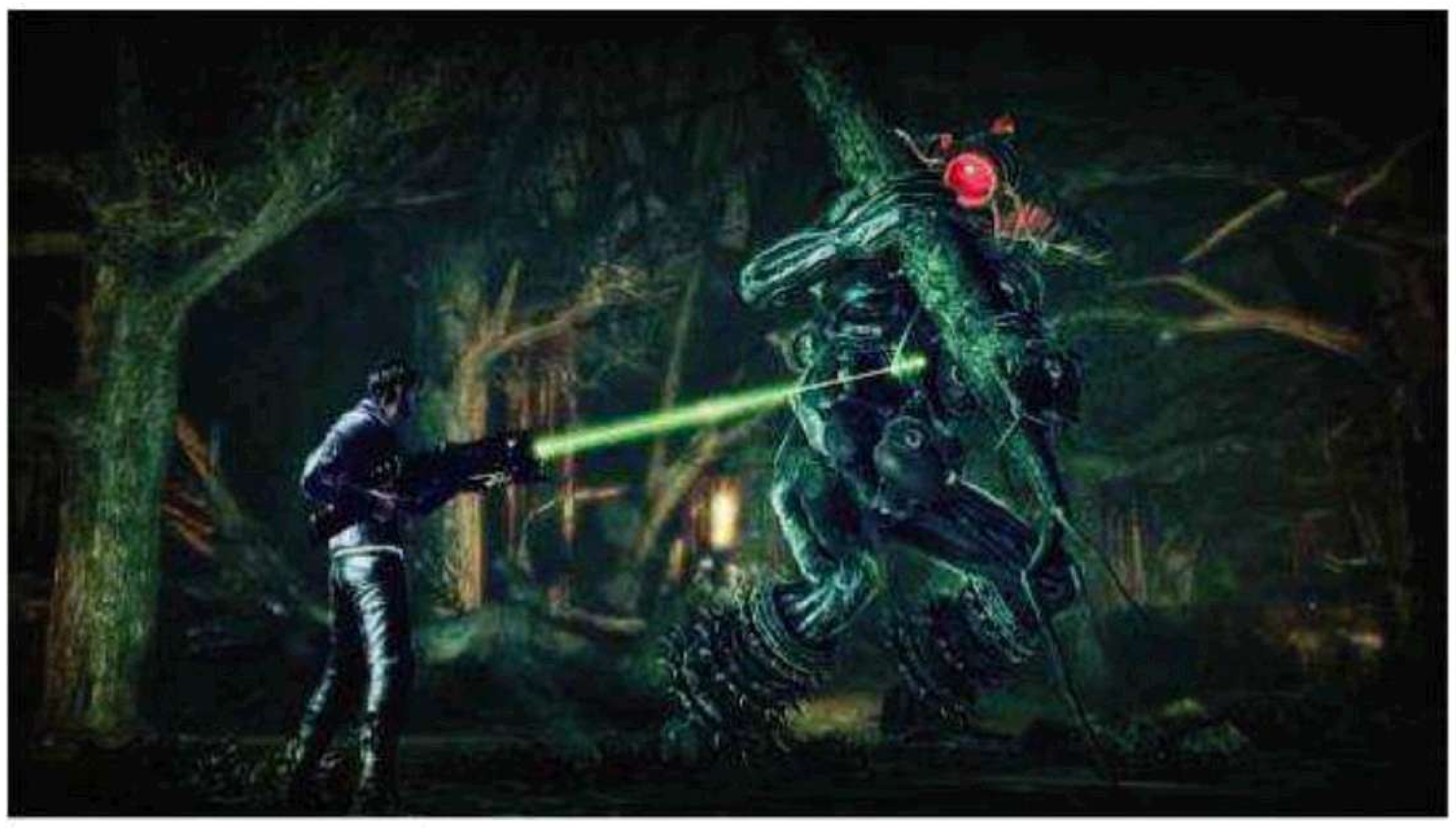
Uh-oh, scary-head-in-a-box alert!

With a story as old as Pandora (via *Hellraiser* and many other, far superior horror movies), this addition to the After Dark Originals range has many flaws, lack of originality being one of the lesser ones. The atmospheric opening scene featuring Templar Knights riding at breakneck speed through an Irish forest is exciting, exhilarating and unfortunately seemed to have used the entire location budget; it's all *Buffy*-style library/laboratory interiors from here on in, and dull it is too. Even with miserable old dependables Lauren Holly (*NCIS*) and rent-a-mentalist Lance Henriksen (managing to pull off the supremely taxing 'as bonkers as Brando and Hopper together' routine), this really is fairly poor. I've no beef with low-budget films, but buckets of blood being thrown, literally, at the camera is not going to threaten the Oscars. I hope the ambiguous and open ending doesn't mean a sequel. **TW** **4/10**

UNINHABITED

(Second Sight, £15.99)

A couple take a holiday on a remote coral island along the barrier reef… but it soon becomes clear they are not alone amid their idyllic surroundings. They come across footprints in the sand, and someone has filmed nice but dim boyfriend Harry (Henry James – no, not that Henry James) while sleeping, on their own video camera. Instead of being scared, Harry suggests he and Beth (Geraldine Hakewill) wear face paint to spook the obvious teenage ragamuffins he surmises are playing games with them. *Eden Lake* or *Lord of the Flies* this isn't, the soporific scenery seeping into the narrative pace of Bill Bennett's horror outing from the off. With its twist in the tale as open as the island vistas and a fashionable verité style punctuating the action, the film is not completely hellish but neither is it the holiday from hell it could have been. **NČ** **5/10**



Shadows of the Damned

XBox360, PS3 £49.99, Grasshopper Manufacture/Electronic Arts

Boner. OK, Hot Boner. Still with me? Massive Johnson.

Right, if you're still reading then there's a chance you won't be too offended by the gushing fountain of dick jokes contained in this game. Then again, that still leaves the sex and horror to put you off… or turn you on.

Spawned from the seriously twisted minds of Suda 51 (*Killer 7*, *No More Heroes*) and Shinji Mikami (creator of *Resident Evil*) comes *Shadows of the Damned*. An arcade style, third person shooter with grindhouse pretensions, outrageous characters, threadbare plot and the lofty aim of stuffing in more penis puns than ever before heard in game or film.

You play Garcia 'F**king' Hotspur, demon hunter – and the game begins with you diving, quite literally, into hell. As you would when a nine-foot-tall demon with penis envy has abducted your girlfriend, Pamela; you must travel to his castle beyond the demon city to rescue her. This, really, is the plot (and the plot of *Labyrinth*, for that matter). Keeping close to its grindhouse aspirations, the story is complemented by a cast of crazy characters, including your talking gun, or 'Johnson' as he's named in the game. Think of a phallic-shaped transforming pistol with a talking skull at the tip and the voice of C3PO, and you'll have some idea what to expect. He is your only companion and sole weapon on this hellish rescue quest, and dispenses game hints, demonological tips and one-liners.

Shadows of the Damned is a very linear third person shooter of tight corridors and rare moments of exploration that are always rewarded – there's no back tracking, à la *Resident Evil*. The game's visual style is that of a great, gothic nightmare, and it's full of varied encounters. Each demon type requires a different takedown, and some can only be dispatched once you have banished a health-sapping mist that infects the area. Unlike too many recent games, I found most of the boss fights here to be a good challenge and distinctly memorable. They can range from frenetic chases through underworld markets to facing off against towering giants. Combat, with its various button combinations, can get quite hectic.

Fans of the *Silent Hill* games may find the music sounds pleasantly familiar. It's from the same composer, Akira Yamaoka. Having now joined Grasshopper Studios, his talent for haunting, unsettling tunes can be heard throughout the levels. However, he shies away from the touching melodies and industrial tracks of the *Silent Hill* series in favour of more atmospheric and occasionally quirky pieces here. Look out for the all-encompassing hellish cacophony of noise during action scenes if you're playing in 5.1 Surround!

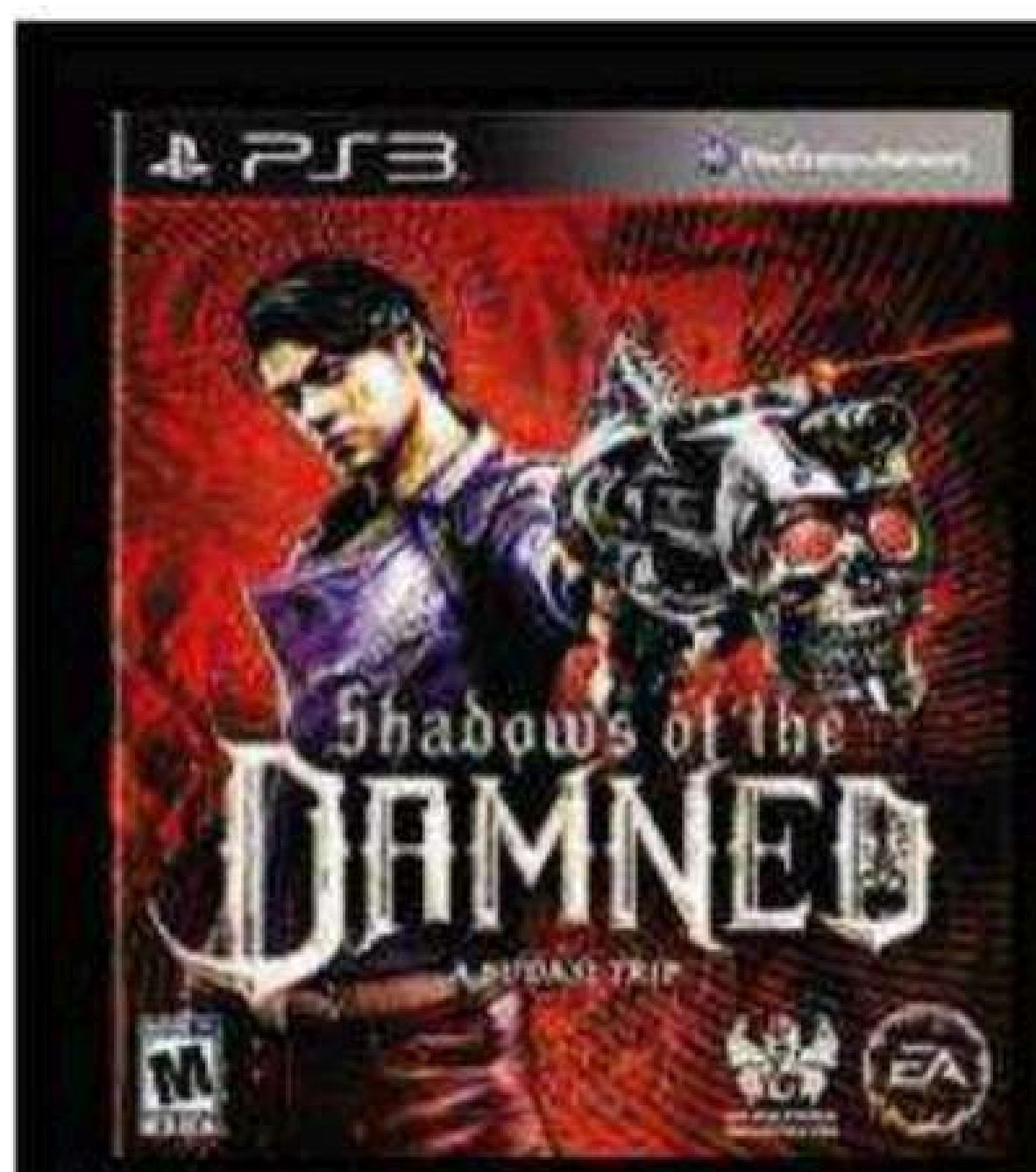
The all-too-familiar purple-black tones and metallic sheen of the Unreal Engine lend themselves well to the world of demons, but you'll find a limited colour palette through most of the levels. Character models look great, although there must be some very sick minds in the art department judging from the visceral torture that Paula endures in the cut scenes.

It's a freaky, impressively gory, disgustingly crude and pretty puerile title that surely didn't have to be so linear – although it clearly delivers the experience its makers intended. If you've played *Resident Evil*, you'll recognise some of the game mechanics and quirky controls. Bolt on some *Evil Dead* and *Ghostbusters* references and you have a bonkers (did I mention the 2D paper cut-out side-scrolling shootem-up levels?) fest that's buckets of fun to play. So, to sum up: an occasionally hard title of a good size, and one that will hopefully penetrate an audience segment that's ready for Garcia and his Johnson… Enough now!

Alexander Norman

Fortean Times Verdict

BUCKETS OF PUERILE FUN, WELL STUFFED WITH JOHNSON JOKES **8**



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From the creative genius of Suda 51 and Shinji Mikami comes an all-new psychologically twisted vision of hell unlike anything seen before. Shadows of the Damned combines visceral action with dark, grotesque horror to create a mind-shattering adventure that has to be seen to be believed. Shadows of the Damned is available on XBox360 and PS3 RRP £49.99).

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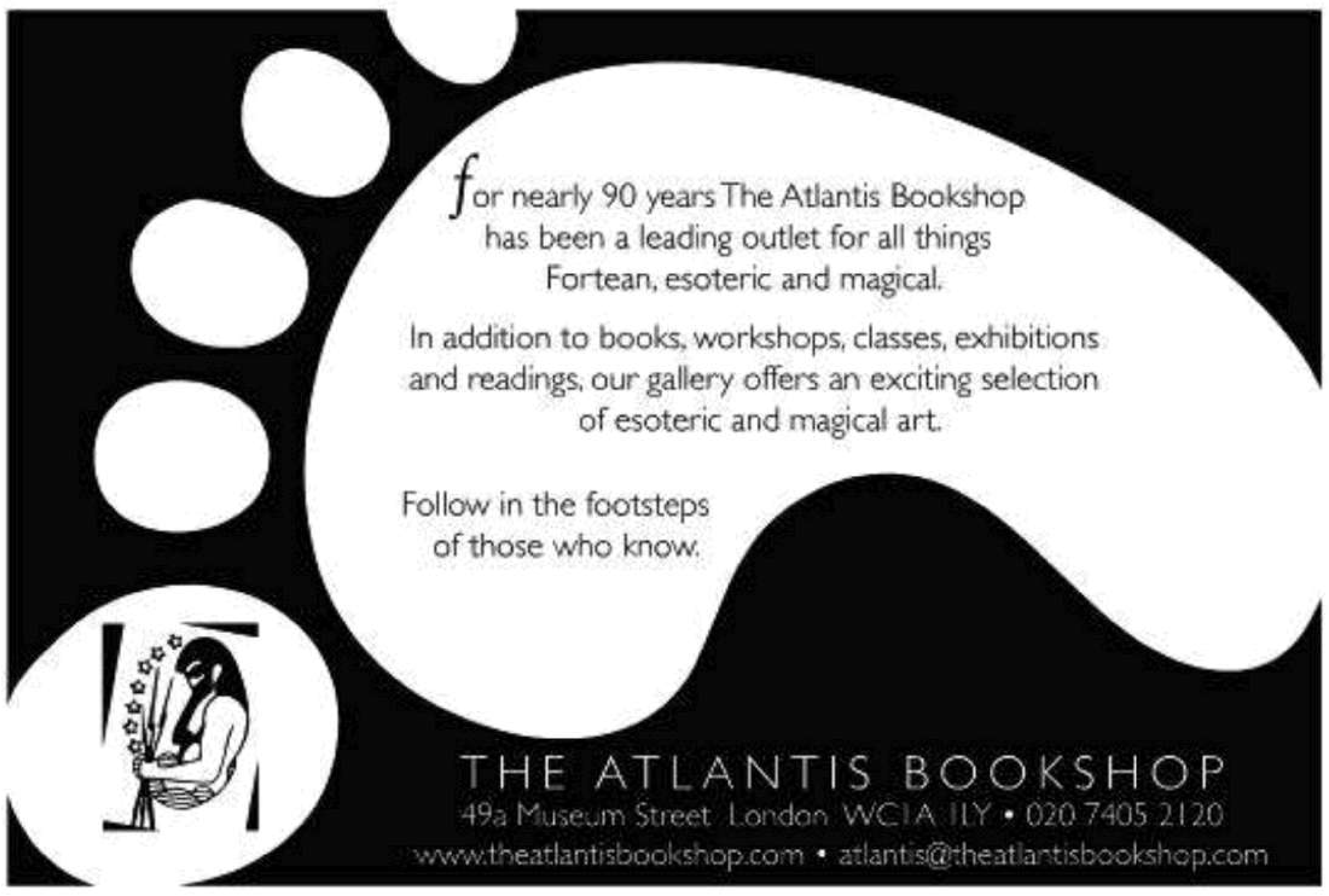
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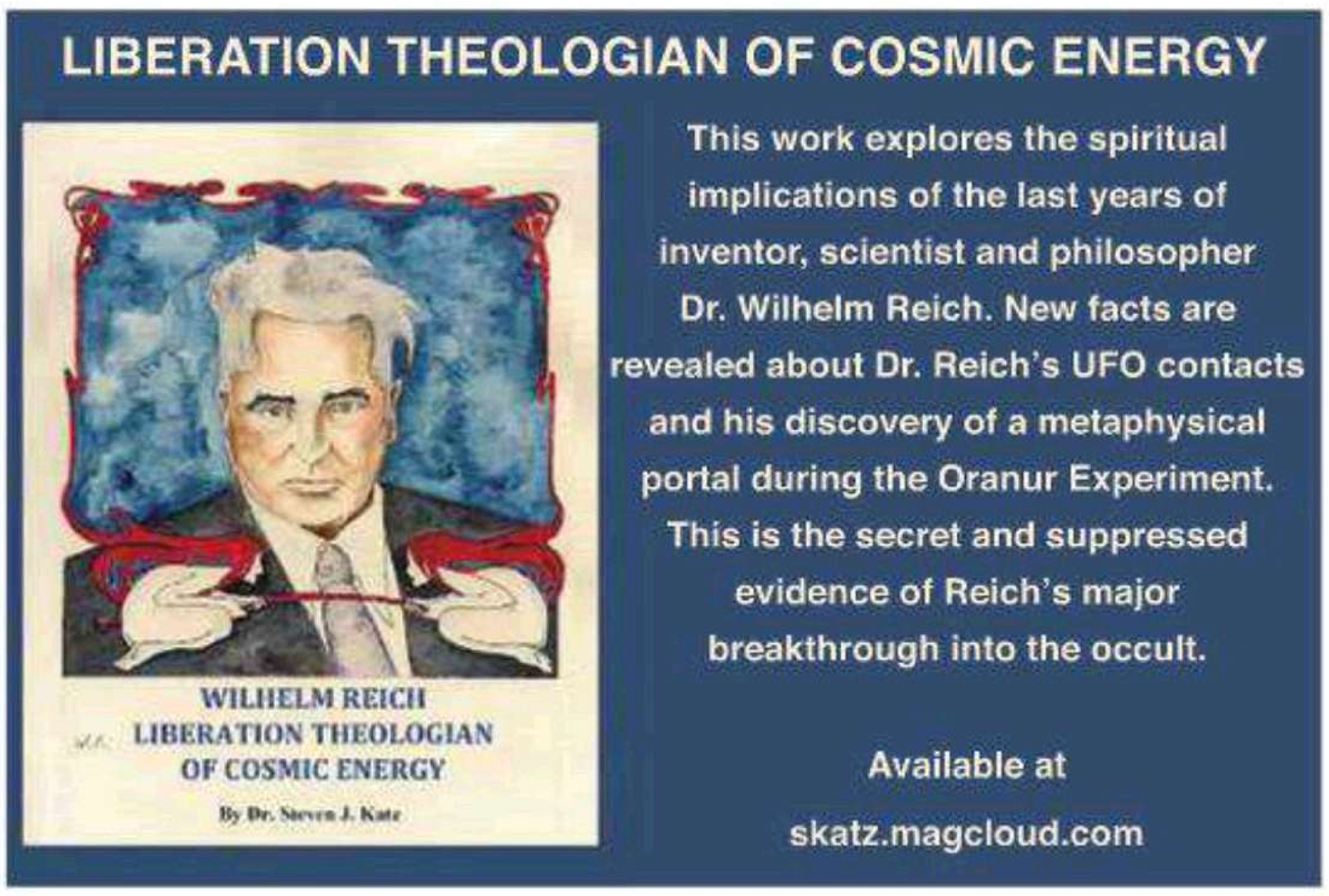
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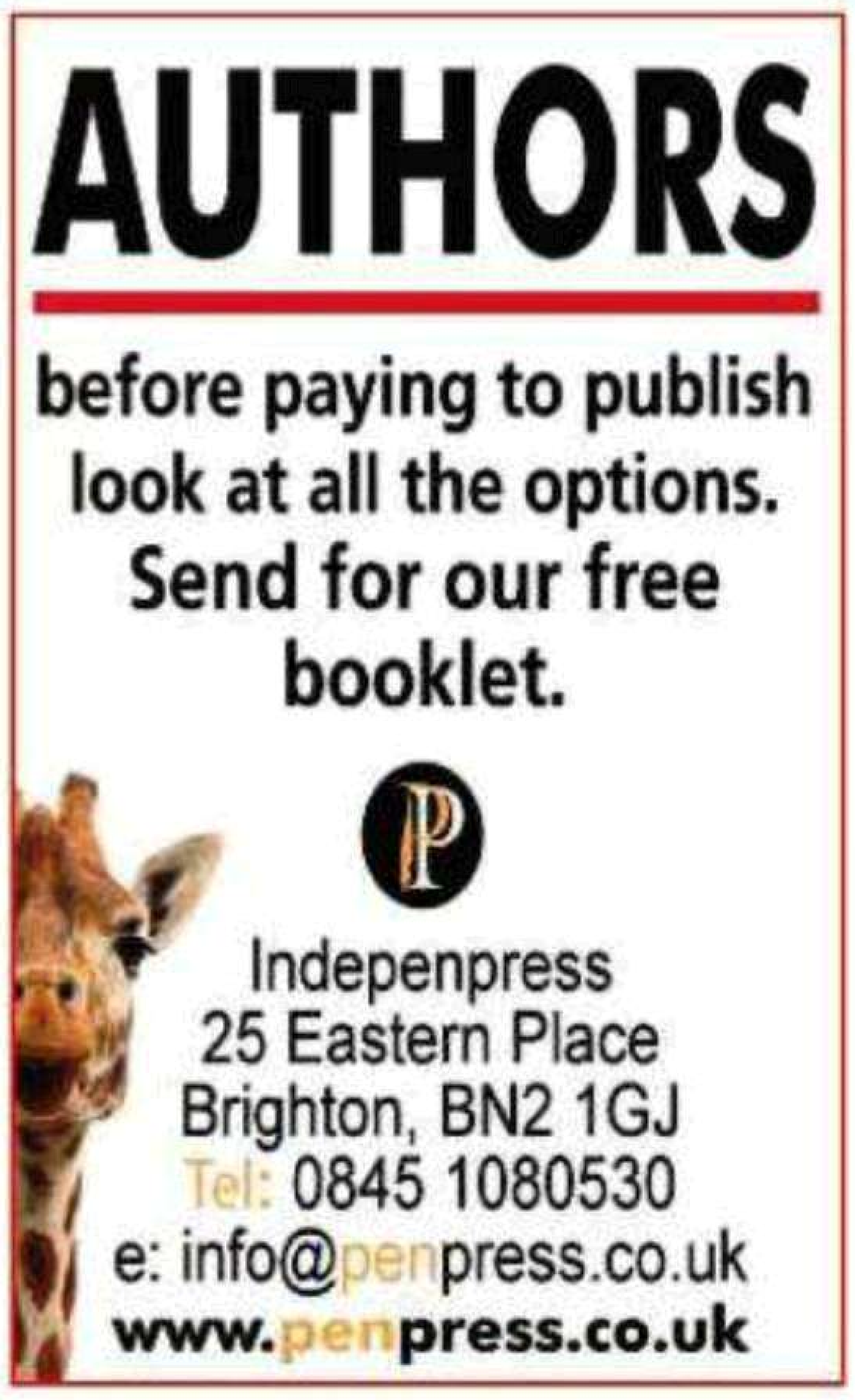
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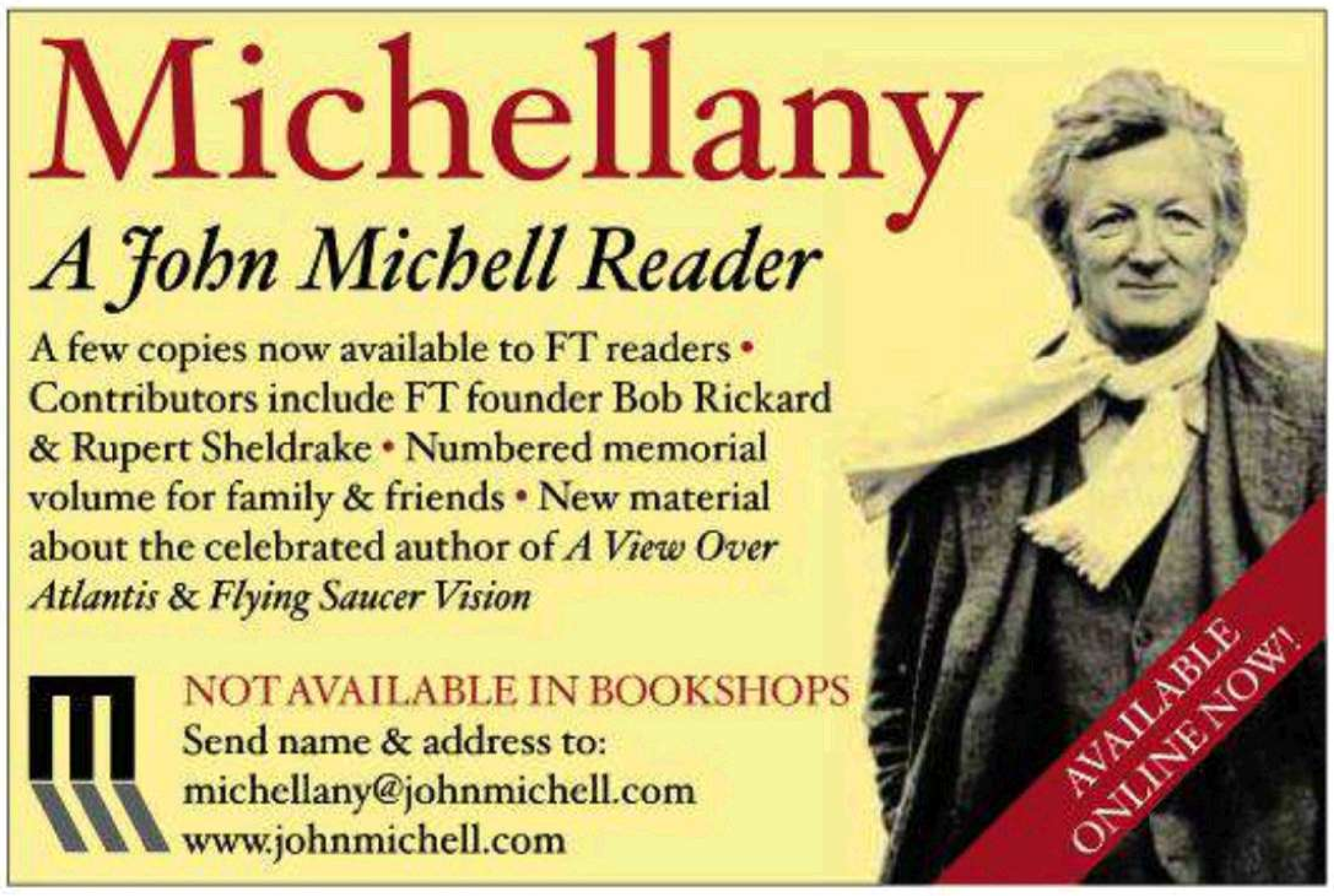
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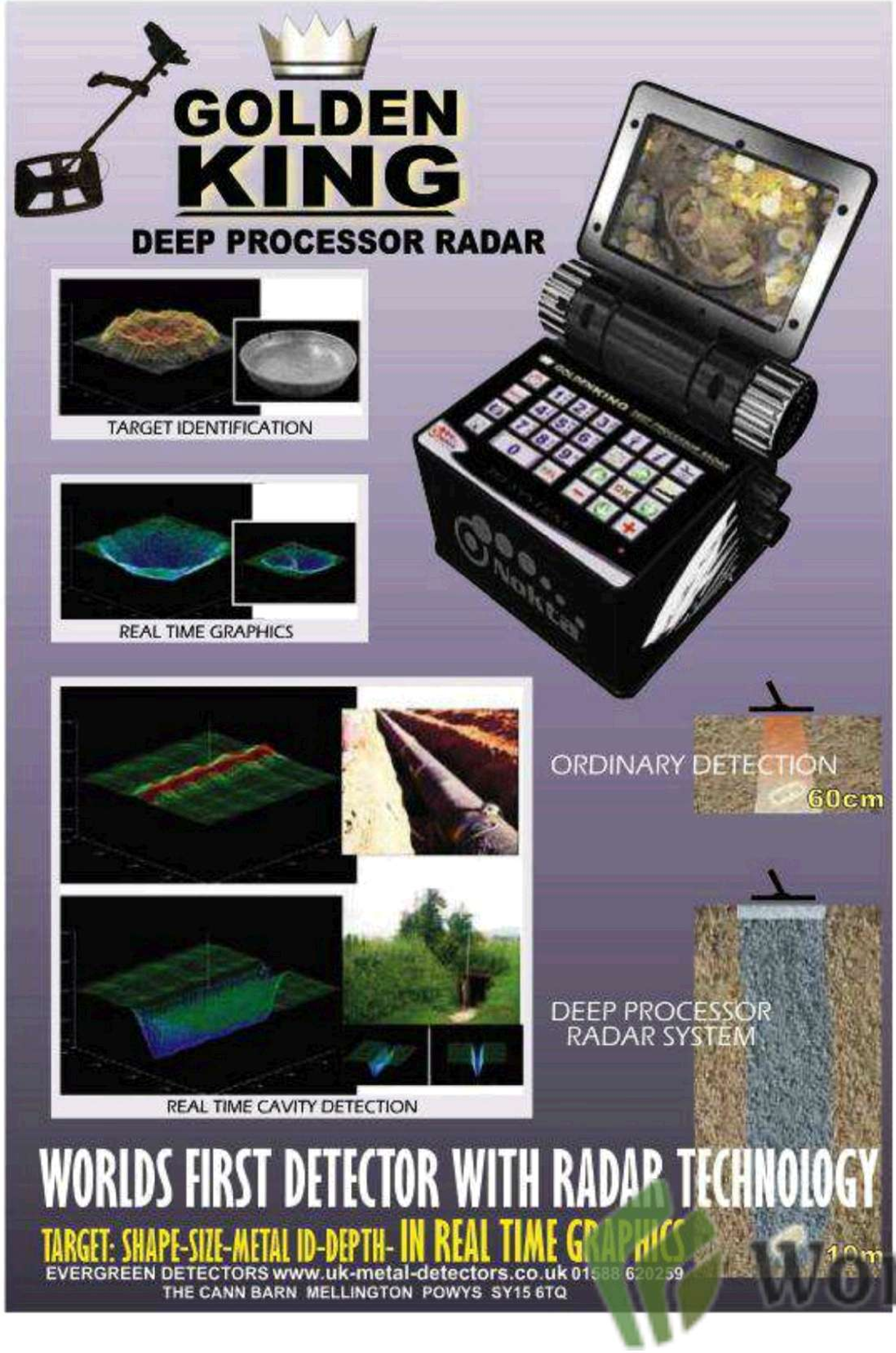

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Nexus Magazine review, Aug/Sept 2007

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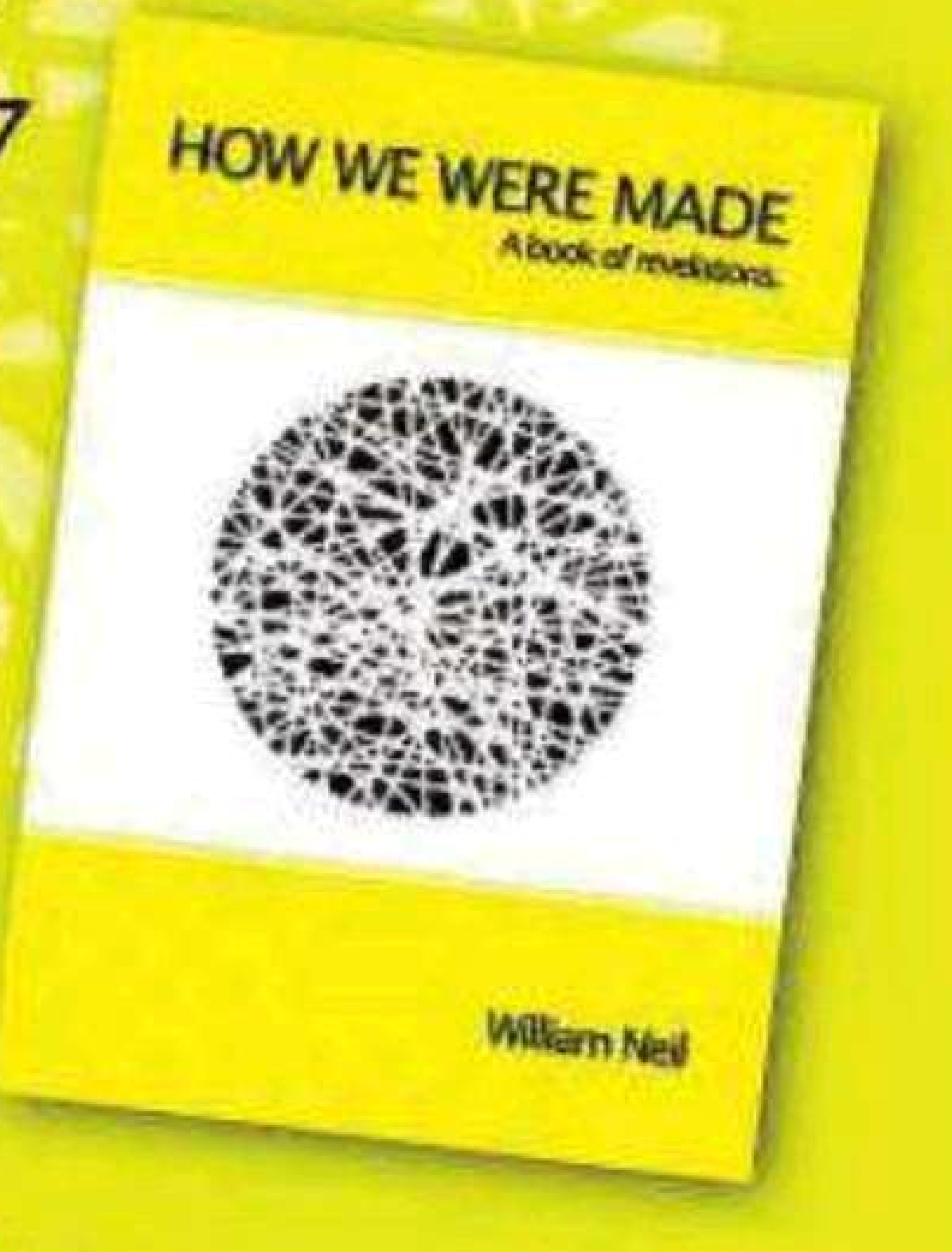
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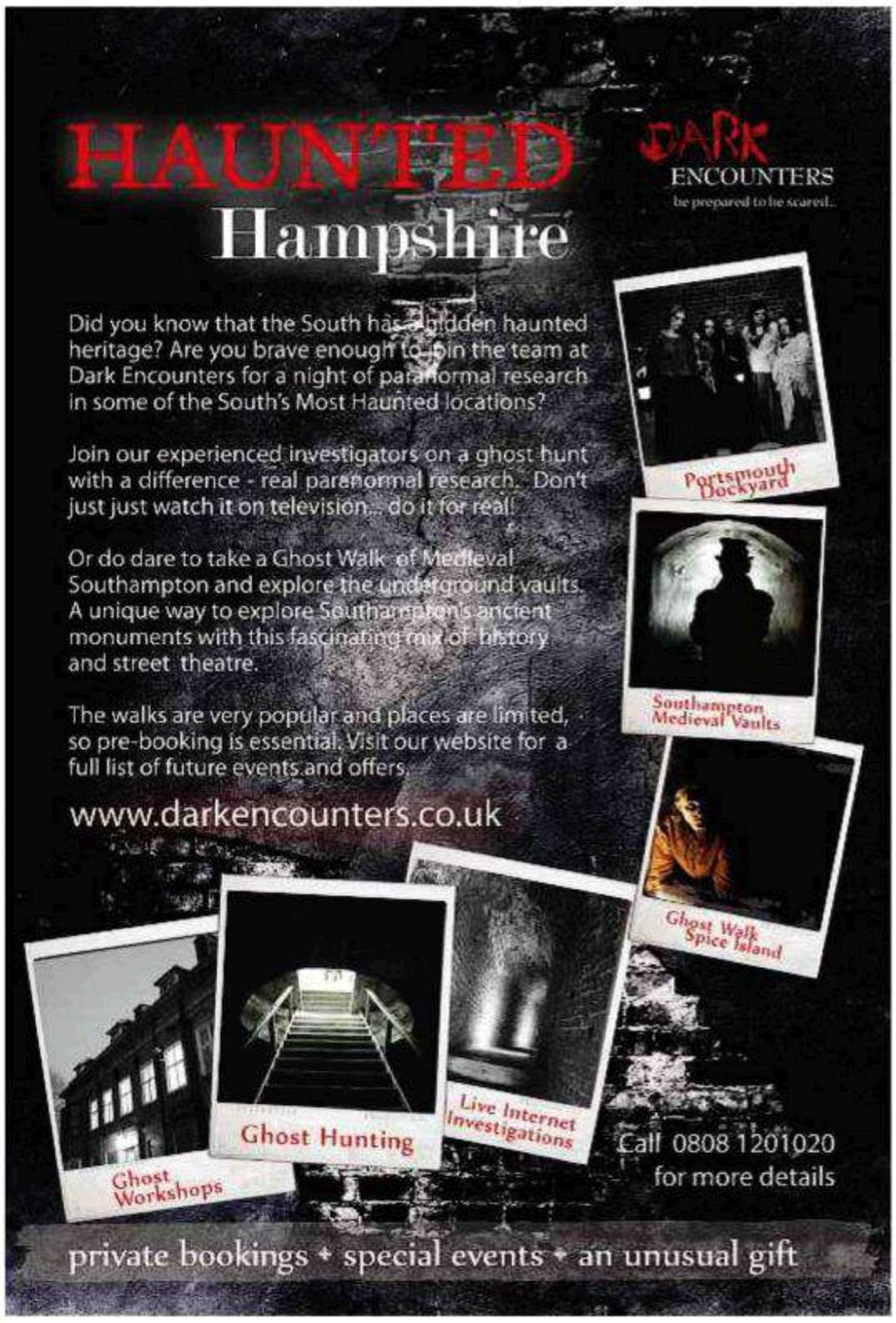
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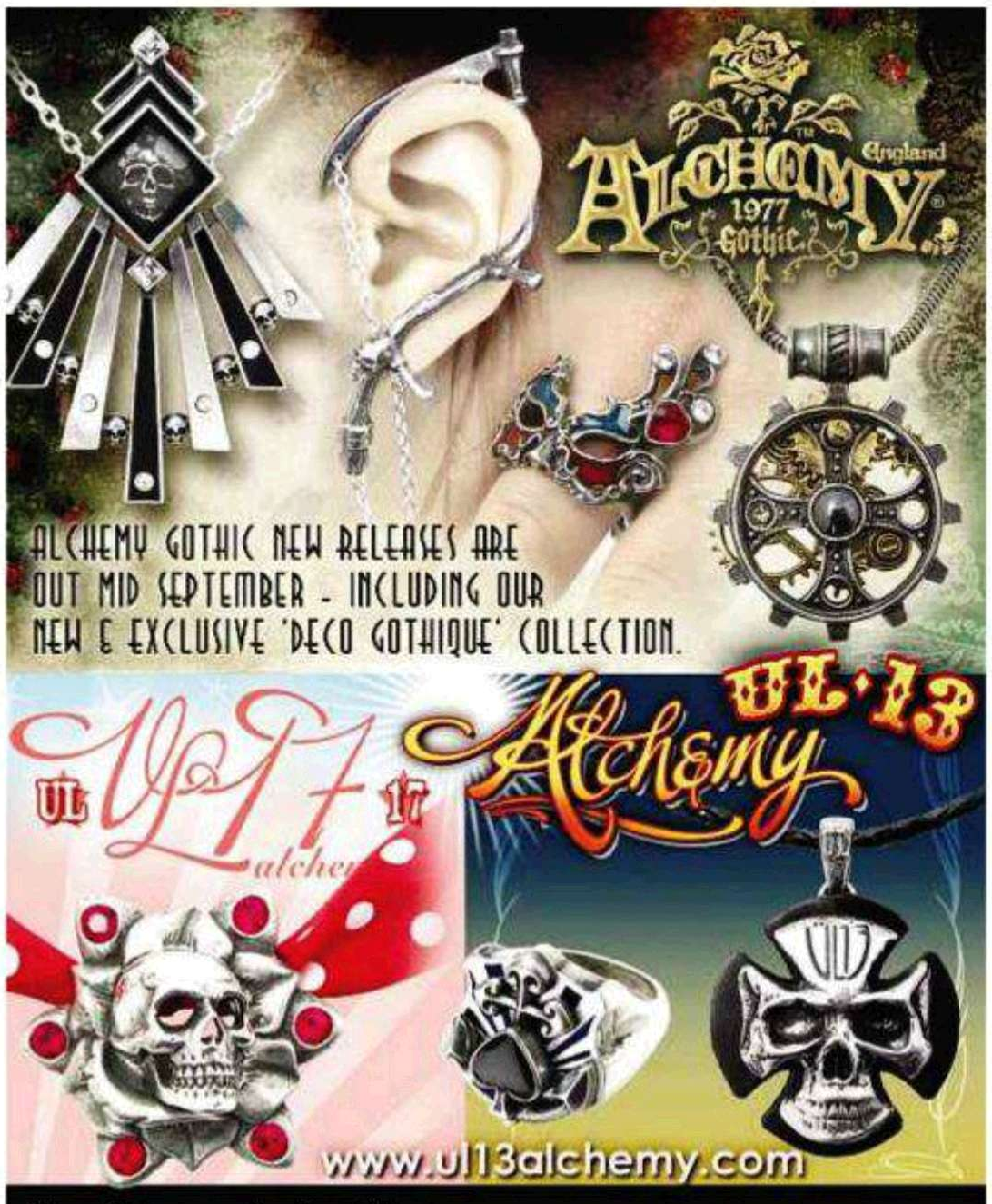
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Dear FT...

letters

Panspermia

Chandra Wickramasinghe's article on the interstellar origin of life [**FT277:32–37**] is interesting, but fails to address some serious objections to his theory. He writes: "It has been argued for several decades that the probability of organic molecules transforming into life in the form of even the simplest bacterium is vanishingly small." Unfortunately, he gives no references to support this assertion. I say "unfortunately" because his entire argument rests on the premise that the emergence of life is extremely improbable. If that premise is wrong, so is the argument.

Stephen Jay Gould (*Wonderful Life*, 1989, p309) wrote: "I do not… view the origin of life itself as a chancy or unpredictable event. I suspect that given the composition of early atmospheres and oceans, life's origin was a chemical necessity." In other words, a respected palæontologist regards the emergence of life as extremely probable. Of course, he may have been wrong; but so may Prof. Wickramasinghe.

What is interesting is how Gould develops his argument. He points out that after life appeared on Earth in the form of prokaryotic cells (e.g. bacteria) about 3.5 billion years ago, nothing more happened for two billion years. Only then did the eukaryotic cell appear (e.g. amœbas). The eukaryotic cell is regarded as the necessary foundation of multicellular animals. However, it took nearly another billion years before multicellular creatures appeared at the Cambrian explosion.

The question which Gould raises is why nothing happened for two billion years, followed by nothing much for another billion years, and then hectic evolution (by geological standards) for the last 550 million years. If the planet was receiving genetic material (however infrequently) over the three billion years after life emerged, why did so damn little happen? Wouldn't the influx of extraterrestrial organisms have had some effect?

So Prof. Wickramasinghe's argument is open to criticism on two grounds: firstly, that it rests on a contested premise, and secondly, that it fails to address issues around the development, as opposed to the origin, of life.

If we want the answers to these questions, perhaps the astronomers and the palæontologists (and a few others) should talk to each other instead of ploughing their lonely furrows and indulging in occasional mutual sniping.

Martin Jenkins
London

SF exhibition

Jen Ogilvie's mainly negative review of the British Library's science fiction exhibition [**FT278:44–45**] made me hesitate in going, but I went anyway and ended up disagreeing with her completely. Although I'm not an SF reader (apart from dystopian novels, but are they really SF?), I felt that the only problem was that it had the wrong title – it was much more wide-ranging. Irrespective of what it's called, it's a very good display of some of the library's more peculiar possessions including some autograph exhibits, such as a letter from George Orwell, and the catalogue is an excellent reference book in its own right. The biggest mystery of all is why the special flat edition of *Flatland* is autographed by Ray Bradbury. This wasn't explained anywhere and apparently only noticed by my wife and me.

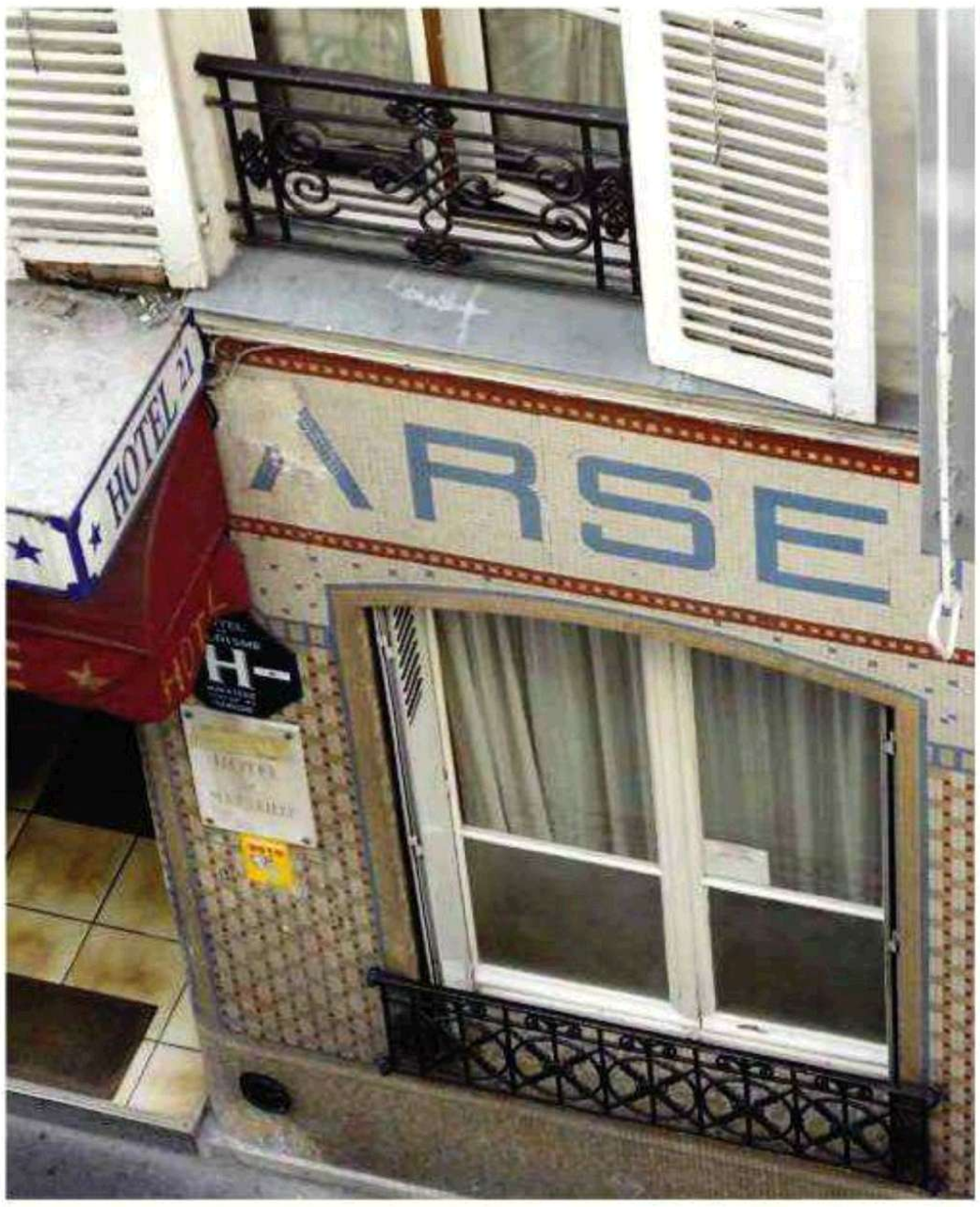
Mike Meakin
Harewood, West Yorkshire

Editor's note: Rather than an inscribed autograph, it could be an owner's mark – another Ray Bradbury (not the American author) has been a member of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group since the 1960s.

Jesus Christ Lizard

In "The Tazelwurm Lives!" [**FT272:55**], Ulrich Magin says the people of Tresivio in Italy have reported sightings of an "agile bipedal lizard" for several years up to 2009. On reading the description from a student of agricultural sciences who made the first sighting, I can't help wondering if this could have been a misplaced specimen of the "Jesus Christ Lizard" (*Basiliscus basiliscus*), so-called because it can run across the water's surface on its hind legs.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida



Hotel Arse

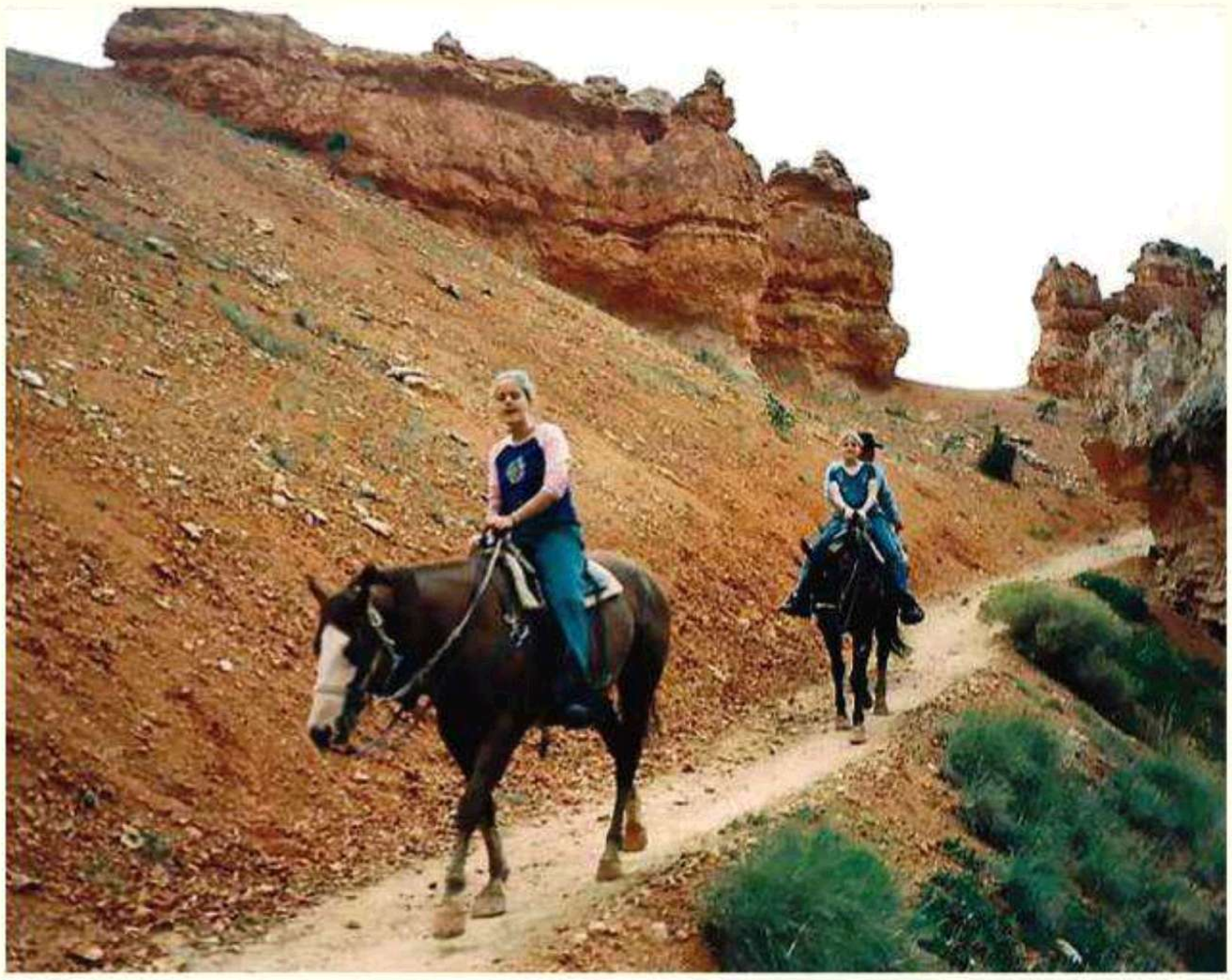
This photograph was taken last May from a room in the hotel Corail in rue Austerlitz near Gare de Lyon in Paris by my friend Piran Bishop. It's actually a view of the hotel de Marseilles, but some of the lettering was obscured by building work.

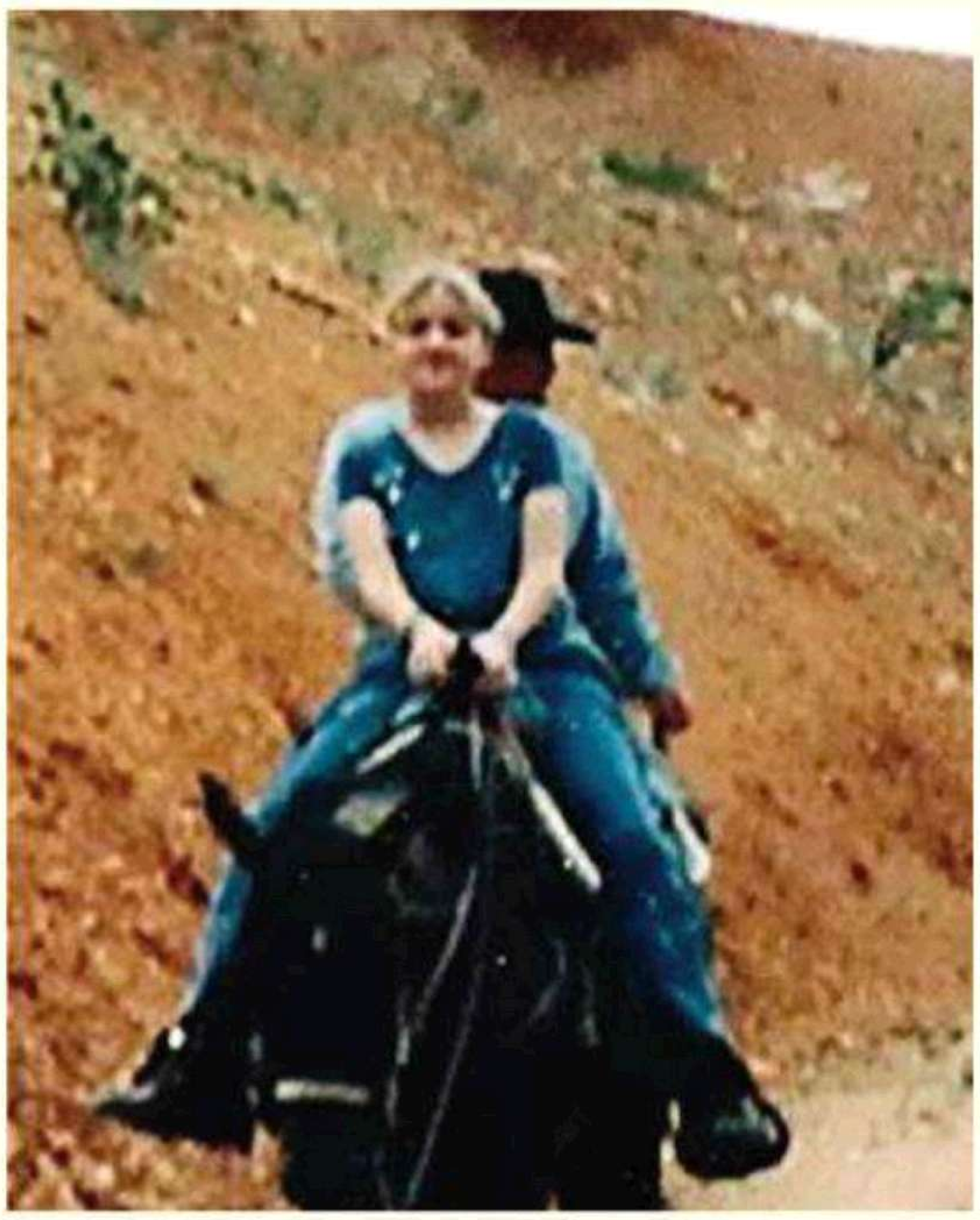
Alexis Lykiard, *Exeter, Devon*

Dogs and tai chi

I have practised tai chi for several years now. This summer, I have been practising regularly in the local park and getting some peculiar responses – from dogs. I guess I am reaching a stage in my training that allows me to feel chi in me and around me, especially near trees, but it's having a really odd effect on the local canine population. It's happened too often to be coincidence. I normally practise with my eyes partially closed, but a few days ago I became aware of three dogs sitting silently and in rapt attention in front and either side of me. Dogs are not normally totally silent and don't usually sit completely still. The spell was only broken when they heard the sound of their owners calling them. Often after a session, many dogs run over to me. I become a doggy magnet! We often talk about animals being in tune with earth forces or energies, or even ghosts. I believe chi is another manifestation of energy that we don't properly understand, and maybe goes some way to helping us understand that when the body dies, certain energies live on and linger in other forms.

Richard Thomas
By email



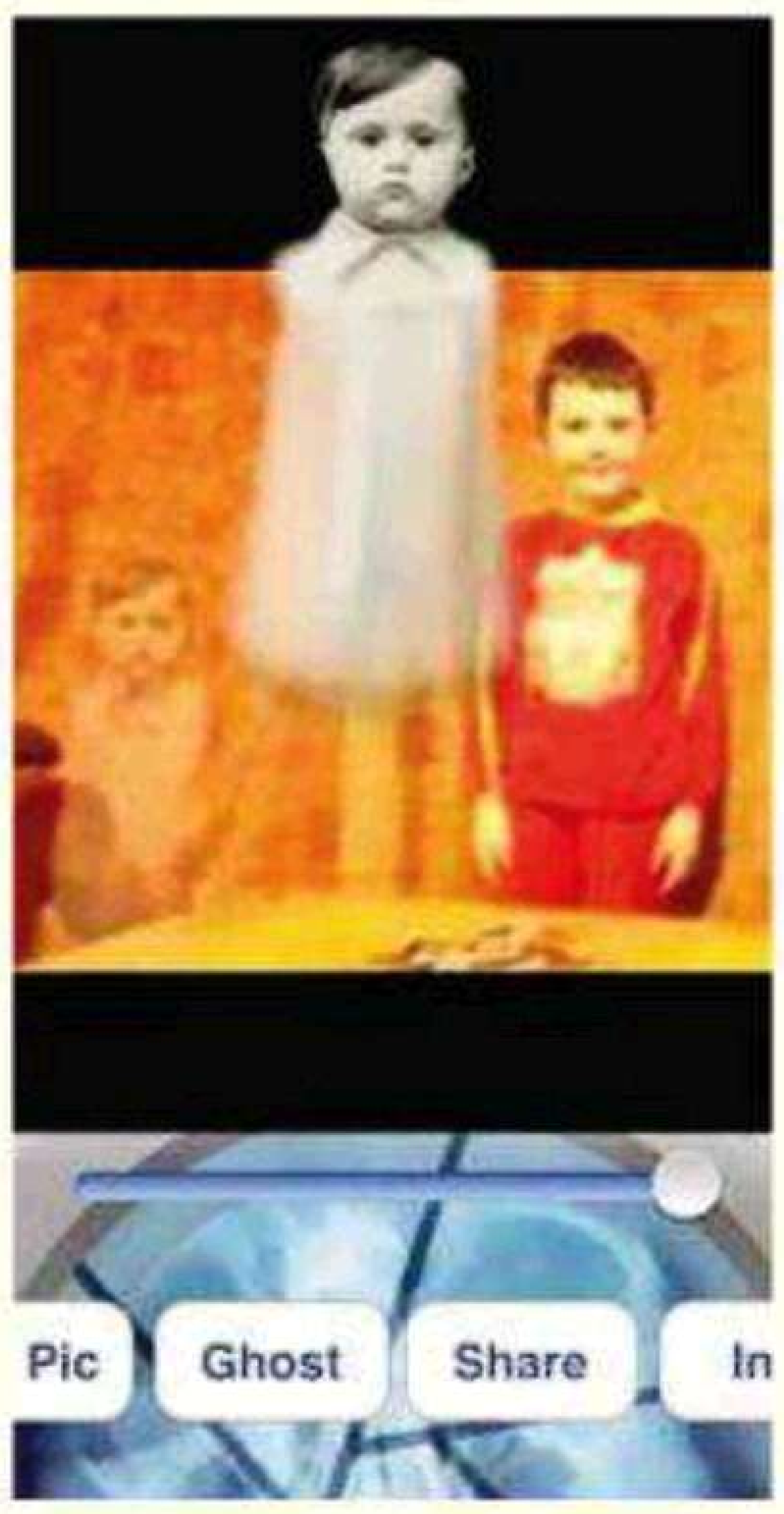


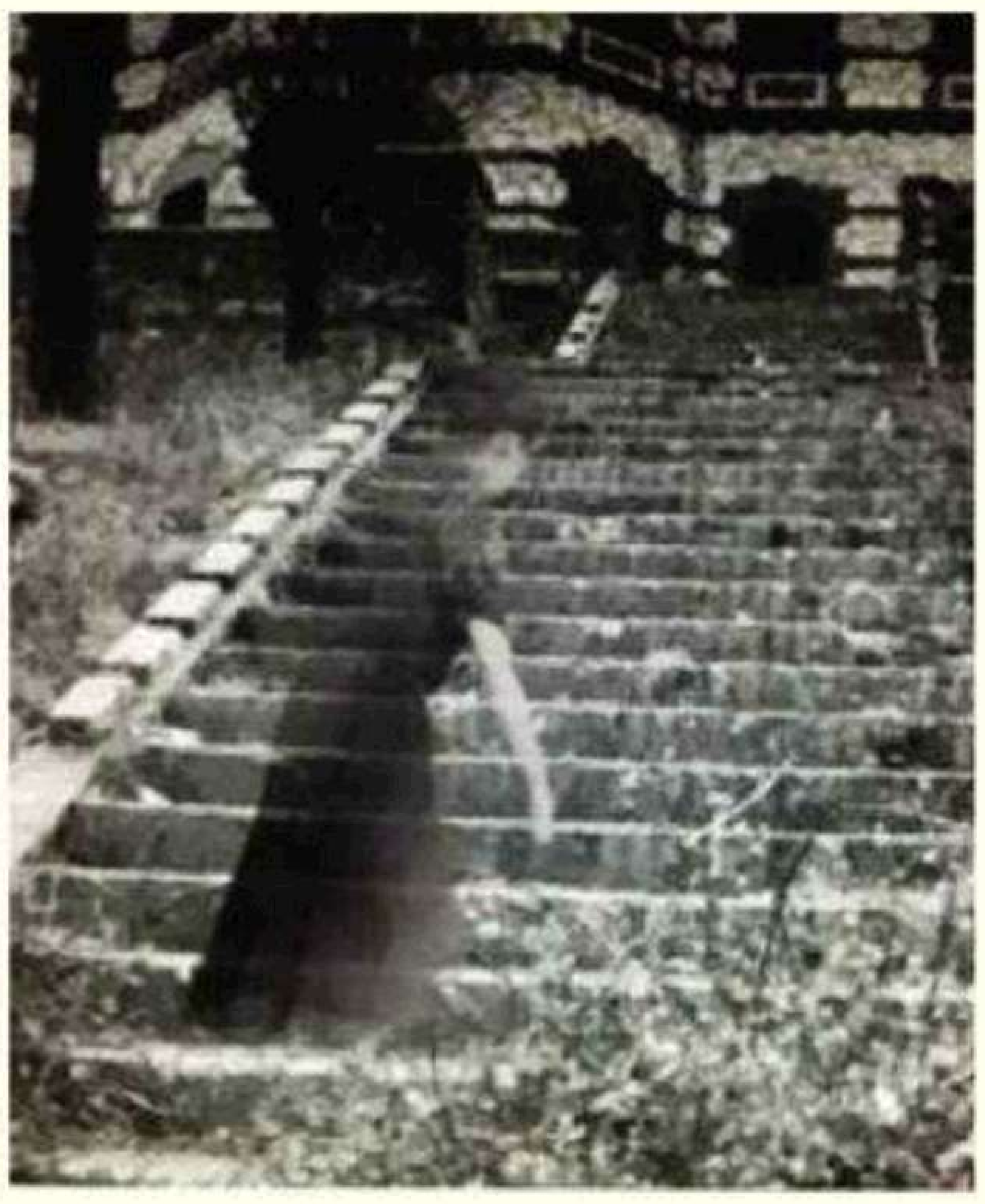
Ghost cowboy

The photograph above was given to me in 1995 by my friend Annie Collinge, who is riding the horse behind her twin sister Miranda through Bryce Canyon, Utah. After their holiday in the USA, Annie came into school and told me about a photograph that had come back with a mysterious "cowboy" riding behind her (detail top right). I was intrigued and asked her to show me. I was so amazed by the photo, she said I could keep it. For some reason that I couldn't understand, she didn't seem particularly interested in it herself, though I do remember her saying that it was a bit spooky and that there was nobody in their riding party wearing that kind of outfit, and that she had been alone at the rear. She seemed convinced that it could be explained as a double exposure.

I rediscovered the photo recently when moving to Germany. Annie and Miranda are still good friends of mine so I asked them to comment before I sent it to *FT*. Annie said that there must have been another horse behind hers, and that the legs of both matched up so completely that it only looks like one horse. Miranda (perhaps not too strangely for a twin) gave the same response. However, neither of these explanations work: it doesn't look like a double exposure, and there couldn't be a second horse behind Annie's. If it were a case of double exposure, it doesn't make sense that none of the cowboy's dark/black hat or face has overlapped with Annie's.

Mrs Rainbow Marshall
Bremen, Germany





Fake ghost

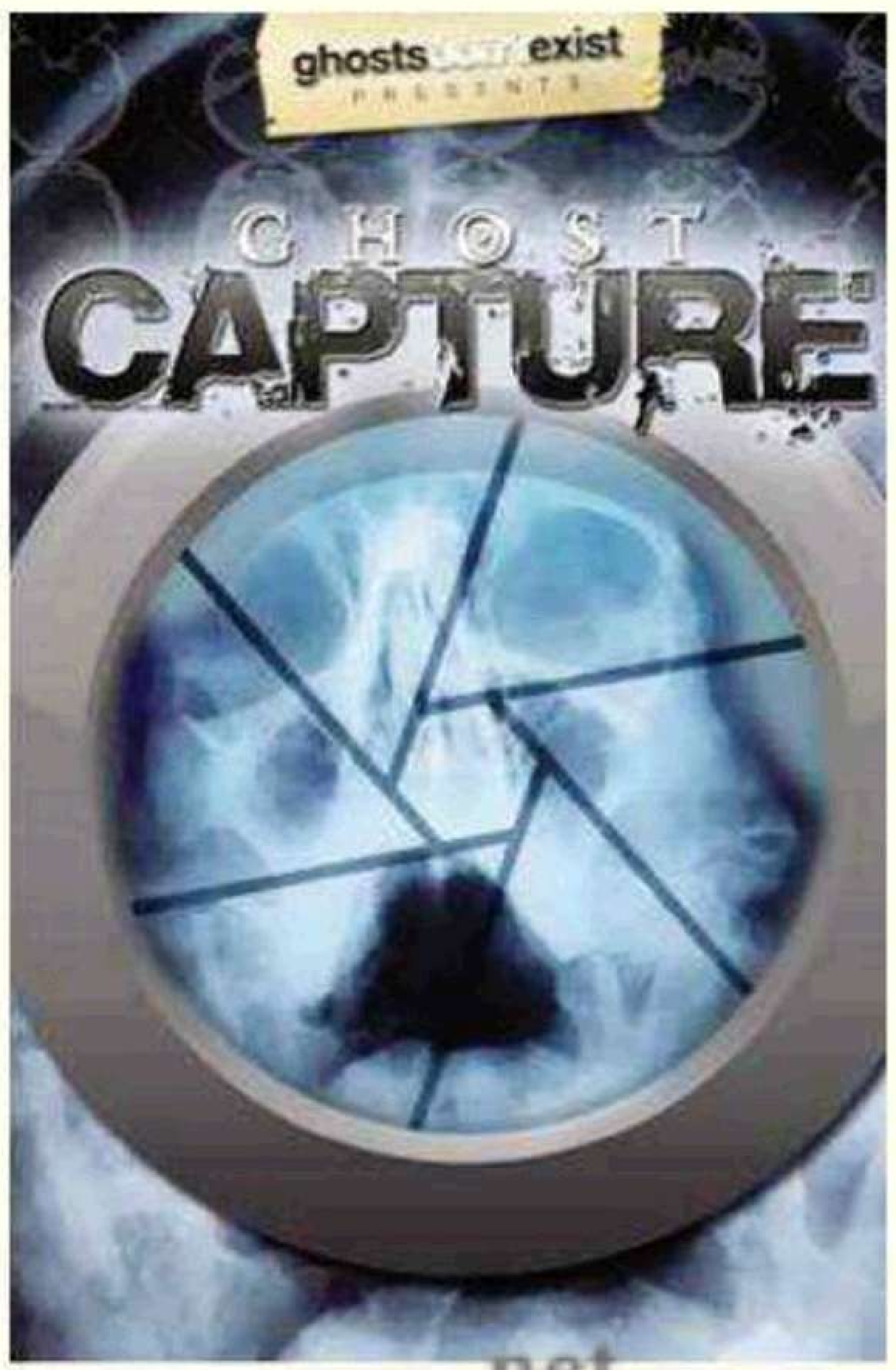
The supposed ghostly image of a little boy ("Imaginary friend?" **FT276:13**) was created by an app for the iPhone called "ghost capture". There are about 30 different ghost images, which you can fade and resize to blend it in to any picture you want (example above).

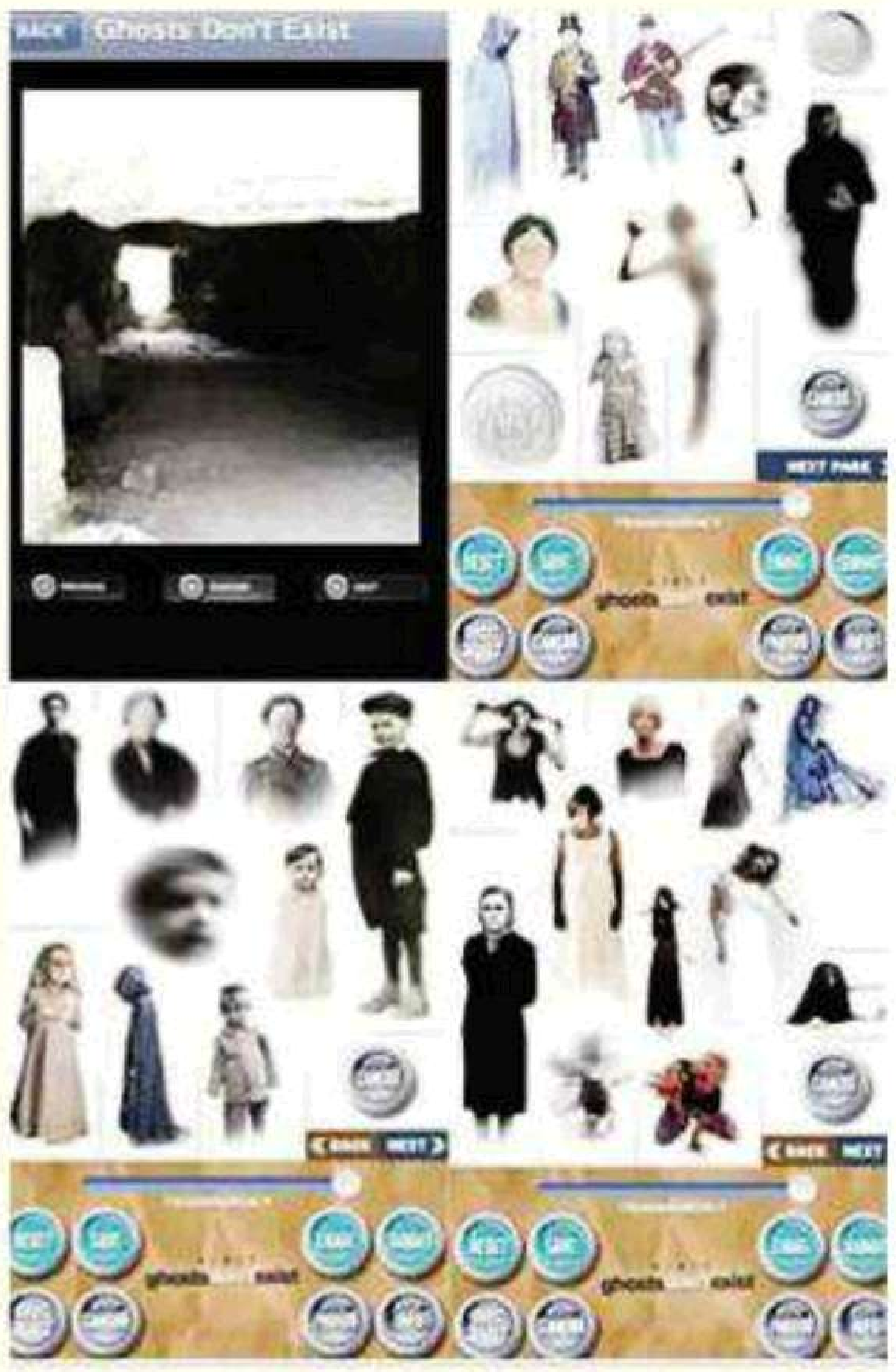
Joe Murray
Dublin

Ghost Capture is a fun app and great for spooking friends and relatives, but I have misgivings about it, knowing charlatans would try to pass their creations off as genuine ghost photographs, proclaiming nobody in their family has the technical know-how to fake a photo. Believe me, it's very simple. Here's one (left) to show what a technophobe like me can achieve.

Sarah Carolan
By email

BELOW: The title screen of the Ghost Capture app and a selection of the characters you can insert into pics.





Back to the future

The Aymara tribe's view of human movement through time seems closer to our actual experience of the phenomenon than the traditional view in the West [**FT278:11**]. We speak of "looking towards the future" and the "past being behind us", whereas the Aymara think of the past being in front of them and the future at their back.

We (non-Aymara) typically conceive of journeying along the "arrow of time" and it makes sense to perceive travelling through time the same way we travel through space, i.e. walking forwards. When walking forwards, however, we have a clear and full view of what lies ahead. This is not the case with moving forwards in time.

If we think instead of moving to the future walking backwards, then we can see the greater correctness of the Aymara's perception. The past, which we are moving away from, is in front of us where we can see it. If we combine the conventional idea of moving from the past to the future with the Aymara's use of language on this subject, then a more complete and agreeable picture emerges. We move forwards in time, but with our backs to it.

Patrick Doherty
By email

Precognition

It was an odd coincidence that the article by Richard Wiseman [**FT273:36–39**] debunking precognitive dreams immediately preceded the interview with John Foxx, that mentioned JW Dunne's *An Experiment With Time*, while curiously neglecting to say what Dunne's book was about. My own copy was found at the Bodhi Tree bookstore in Los Angeles, and the coincidence lies in the fact that Dunne's experiment was able to produce as credible an argument as may exist that many precognitive dreams are indeed valid psychic phenomena. Dunne used painstaking criteria to establish various degrees of correlation between the dreams of his subjects and subsequent events, and at the highest degree his results appeared to transcend mere probability. The dreams that were studied were not "disaster dreams" but instead often corresponded closely with unspectacular events and circumstances occurring within the fairly short time frame of the study, sometimes the very next day.

For anyone who has experienced any form of paranormal or psychic phenomena, there really is no debate on whether these do reflect a true psychic reality, while at the same time such persons (including myself) may be perfectly happy to believe that their own calamity dreams of tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, and terrorist attacks (in my case, for example, shortly after 9/11, a terrifying dream of the follow-up Al Qaida attack that seemed very likely at the time) can readily be explained by neuroscientists as other than previsions of the actual future. But a larger issue, typically ignored, is that if any class of psycho-spiritual phenomena, including precognitive dreams, is totally bogus, then all such seemingly paranormal categories from telepathy to resurrection of the dead must be delusions or "magical thinking" – if not some hallucinatory cerebral quirk – that in theory could be rationally accounted for. And in such a case, across the Styx can dwell naught but oblivion, so why waste one's fleeting moments in the Sun in trying to prove that immortal souls are a rhetorical conceit?

Actually, there are two reasons why, but paradoxically, accepting the first as valid requires a highly paranormal belief. The theosophical teachings of Alice Bailey – purportedly received telepathically, but if not, a *tour de force* of human imagination – maintain that sceptical attacks on claims of the psychic and paranormal are a defence mechanism motivated by subconscious racial memory of Atlantis, whose destruction was partly caused by the wicked misuse of psychic powers by that hypothetical lost civilisation. Be that as it may, the second reason is nearly self-evident. Imagine what Pandora's box might be opened if science and academia officially acknowledged that truly psychic (hence largely inexplicable) phenomena *do* exist.

Either way, believers who decry rationalist disparaging of metaphysical notions could think again. Perhaps scepticism of the paranormal is no less vital for society than inhibitory feedback loops for the body, even if psycho-spiritual dimensions do from time to time manifest via a "twilight zone" – and indeed may pervade a Universe whose truest proportions transcend the purview of science.

Richard Porter
Denver, Colorado

Woman by the bridge

As a boy in Bisacquino, Provincia Corleone, my father had use of the family pony – a great privilege in late 1930s rural Sicily – and he used the animal to travel to work on a farm some three miles (5km) away. On the way to the farm, he had to go under a bridge that spanned a river, and the pony regularly refused to do so. During the day it wasn't so bad; with luck and incentives the pony could be made to gingerly inch its way through, but at night it was impossible and my father would have to take the long way round. He made some tentative general enquiries about this and was told there was a ghost at the bridge, the spirit of a man who had fallen off his horse and drowned. In Sicily it is not always wise to pry too deeply into accidents like this, so my father kept his counsel and said no more.

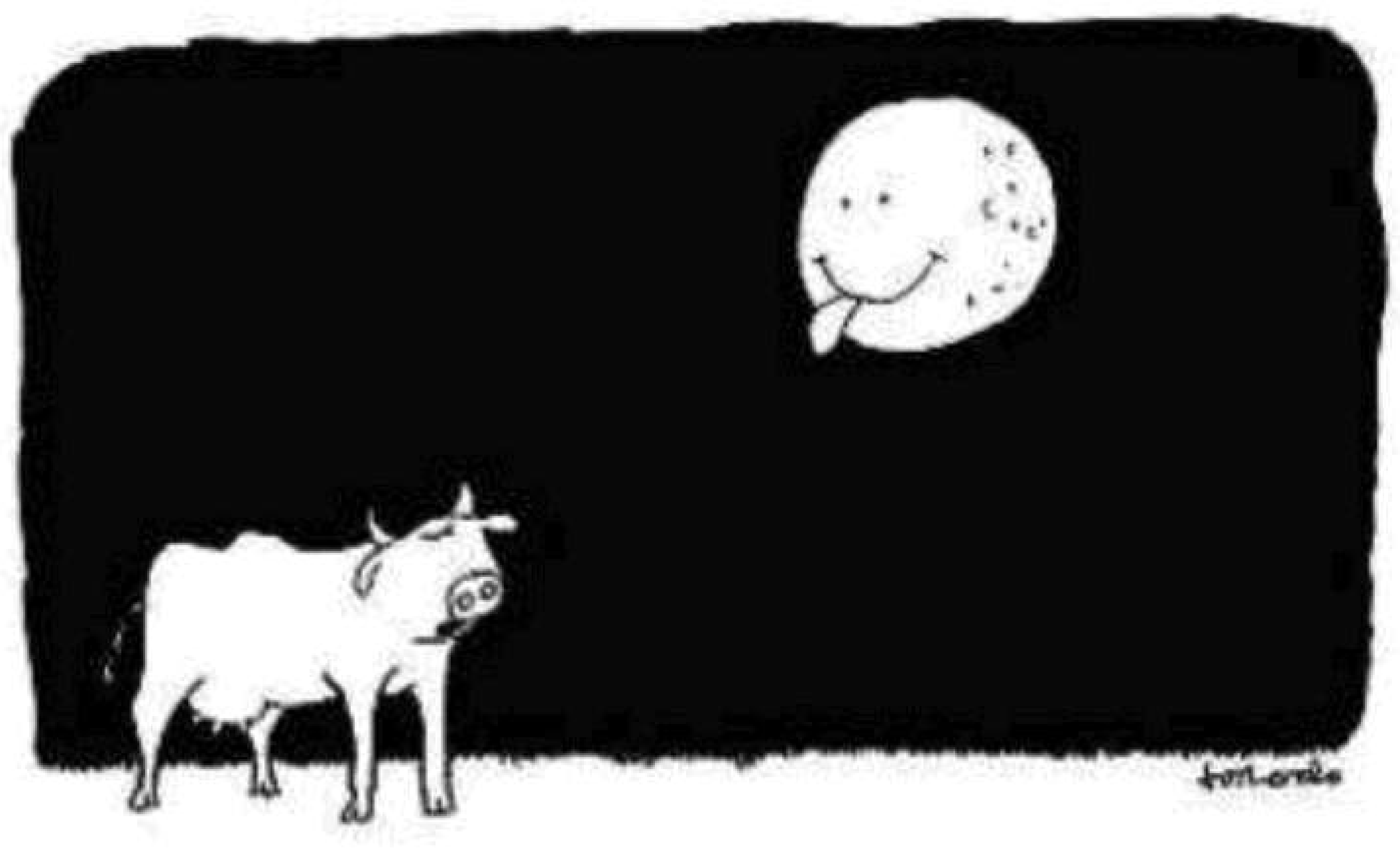
However, one evening many years later, he mentioned it to a close friend who said excitedly: "I know the bridge. I know the exact spot. I used to have to go there on my way to school, when I was about nine or 10. I was regularly accosted there by a very beautiful young woman who was bathed in golden light, radiant. Her clothing, a flamboyant semi-bridal dress, appeared to have a sort of electric sheen; it sparkled and crackled. She seemed to be calling me, enticing me into her arms. I knew something was wrong, first because I was a boy and she a woman and this of course wasn't right, and secondly because she was quite clearly not of this world. As she beckoned me, I heard the sound of coins falling and it caused me to look down. There were two lire on the ground, brand new, so I picked them up and put them in my pocket. When I looked up again, she had gone. This scenario went on every day for quite some time, and I amassed quite a decent sum for a schoolboy. My father found out and asked me where it had come from. I was afraid of a beating, so I lied to him and said I'd been doing some extra work for someone. But the wraith was becoming more aggressive, coming closer to me, and beckoning with increasingly intensity. She was beautiful but she frightened me; she seemed to be mouthing words but no sounds came out. Nevertheless, I was still keen on the money, so I asked my sister to come along. This time, the ghost was bang in the middle of the path, her arms open, imploring me to come to her – previously, she had stood to one side. Once again, I heard the sound of coins falling. I told my sister to occupy the ghost's attention while I picked up the money, but my sister simply said, 'What are you talking about? There is no-one there'.

"I went back quite a few times after this but only saw the ghost, somewhat faded, just one more time; after that, nothing. The place looked ordinary and uninviting, but I still get a chill whenever I walk past, even now. I certainly wouldn't go back willingly, and with hindsight I can't believe I did what I did, even if the lure of money was too much for a youngster."

This friend of my father's is still alive, albeit in his 80s; my father insisted that I rang him there and then, which I did, and he repeated the tale almost exactly as my father had told me; there was no question of the two conniving. In fact, I'd originally only gone round to see my father to help him fill in some forms, and the conversation had drifted.

I've pondered over this one; perhaps the place was some kind of portal; perhaps there was something there that let a young boy realise his innermost dreams. I would like to hear from anyone who has any idea of what this episode means and would appreciate any correspondence.

Jack Romano
By email



"Don't make me come up there!"

JOHN ROBERT DOCHERTY

it happened to me...

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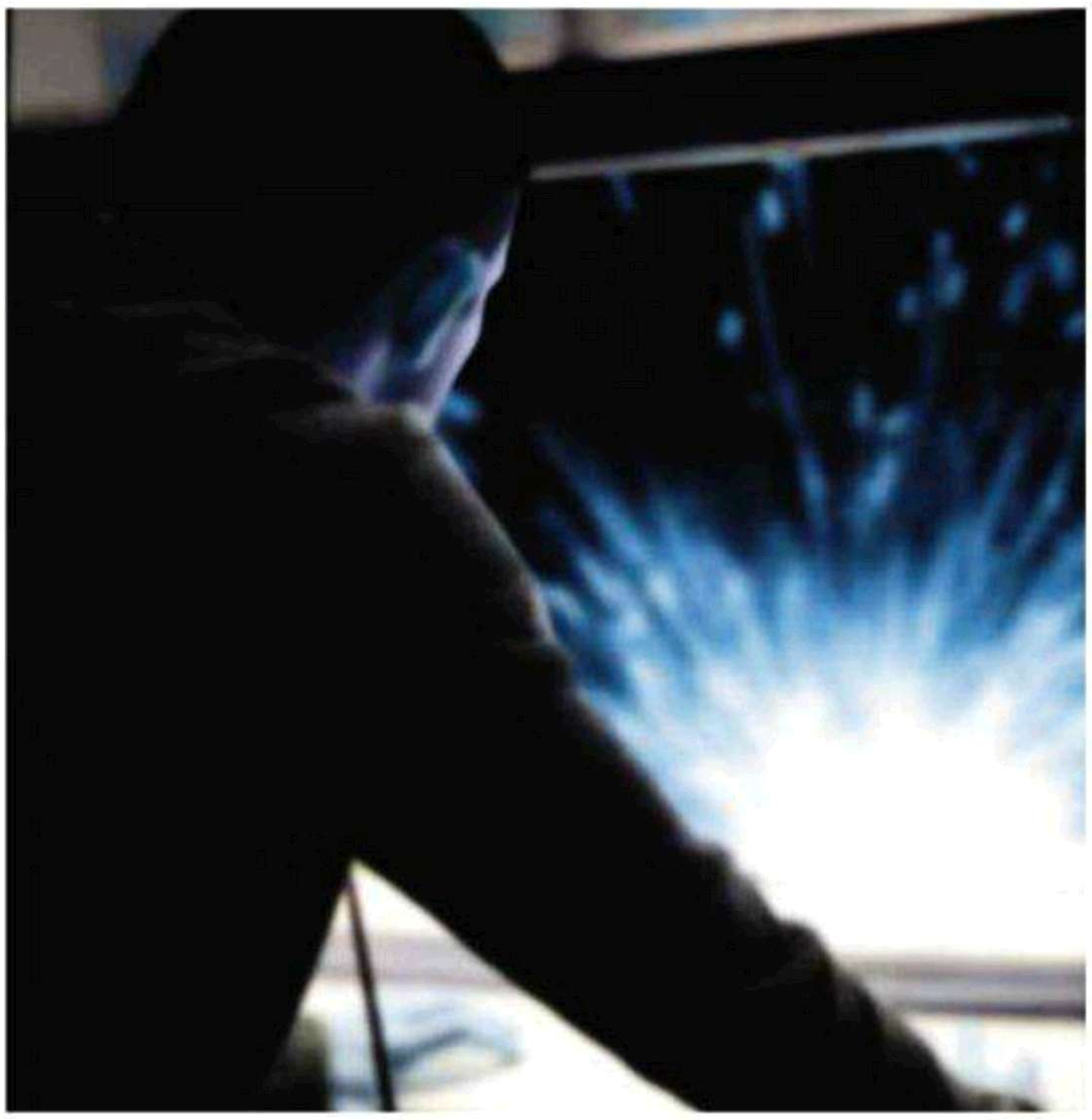
Stormy night on Bute

During the summer of 2010, I went on a cycling trip for a few days to the Island of Bute and Argyll in Scotland. My mates couldn't get off work on the Thursday or Friday, so I arranged to meet up with them nearer Dunoon on the Saturday. I set off in glorious weather and decided to camp near Colintraive, just a short ferry hop across to the mainland from the north of Bute. I had camped there before and knew a great spot from where I could go and do some canyoning up the burn (stream). This site was ideal, with trees and rhododendrons providing a thick canopy and plenty of dead wood for the fire. It was high up a steep hill from the village and there was a ruined building with just a gable and low walls remaining. An iron fence enclosed the copse and the ground was largely bare earth due to the dark canopy of leaves. The weather in the evening took a turn for the worse and a huge gale blew up. Despite this, I managed to get a roaring fire going and thought that my day's labours would ensure a sound sleep. How wrong I was.

I must have decided to turn in just after midnight and I peed on the fire to extinguish it, poured the contents of my kettle on it, then got my shovel and buried it to make doubly sure. To my delight, my new one-man tent was watertight and wind proof, but the noise of the trees in this mounting storm was almost deafening so sleep was impossible. I put on my radio but, because of my location, was only able to receive Radio 2, and that night they seemed to be having a Kenny Rodgers-a-thon. I switched it off, as listening to the storm seemed more attractive. Leaves and twigs were now hitting the tent quite regularly and I began to question my choice of pitch in case a larger branch decided to come calling. It must have been around 3.30am when I was thinking that I wasn't going to get any sleep and I opened my eyes. To my puzzlement, it looked as if the Sun had risen because the tent was bathed in that kind of light. I was able to see round the tent quite clearly and was a bit confused. After about five seconds, it went suddenly pitch black again and I froze. The first thing I thought was that there was someone shining a light, but I could only hear the storm. There had been no lightning or thunder, and the duration of this light had been far too long for a lightning flash anyway.



My imagination then started to run riot; was there someone or something there? But if that was the case, why was the light omni-directional? I was seriously bricking myself now and tried to rationalise it as best I could. The nearest dwellings were far down the hillside and I discounted far-off car headlamps shining though the bushes, so my conclusions were now lurching towards the paranormal. I noticed that my snug tent was similar in shape to a coffin! I began to think that perhaps the fence-enclosed copse had been a graveyard and that the ruin was a chapel. For the rest of that fretful night, my tent was pelted with leaves and twigs, as the wind and rain were relentless. When eventually the Sun did rise, I managed to relax a bit and dozed lightly, but I decided to get an early exit out of there. At about 7am, I got up and when I opened the tent, the fire was going! Not as big – but it was definitely burning despite my efforts to extinguish it.

I made a cuppa and packed up, put out the fire for a second time and donned my waterproofs. By 9am, the weather was glorious again and I had to unpeel all my soggy layers. I met up with my mates 17 miles later, and they just ribbed me about my experience, with questions about aliens and rectal probes. I could laugh about it then but a few hours earlier I had been as terrified as I've ever been. The best explanation that I have subsequently come up with is that perhaps a fireball might have passed overhead and bathed the area in dim light. There were a few reports that summer of such occurrences, and a friend had seen one near Prestwick one morning which was reported on the BBC website. As for the fire, perhaps embers deep inside a thick log survived and were stoked into life again by the wind. I would go back – but maybe not alone.

Colin Irons
By email

The blue light

I was living in Delaware, near Newark, when in the late fall of 1996 I was putting clothes away in my son's room. It was between 8 and 9pm, and as I walked to his dresser I saw a light outside his window near the house… It was near the base of the house to the bottom left, out of my immediate viewing range. It grew in size and sounded like arc-welding or some kind of electrical discharge. It was very bright, blue-white, and noisy. I was taken by surprise, and, as I knew that our propane tank was on that side of the house, I left the room quickly and yelled at my son to get out of the tub. I was afraid that the house might be on fire. I went back into my son's room to get his robe, and noticed that the light and noise was gone. I grabbed a flashlight and went outside to inspect the damage. There wasn't any!

My father used to weld, so I know that kind of light means high temperatures. There were dry leaves lying in the vicinity of the light show, but none was singed or even disturbed. The light had seemed to be right against our house, but the brick and siding had no marks on them. The propane tank, just a few feet away, also bore no evidence of any arcing, burning or other electrical damage.

It was a clear night, no clouds, no storm activity. I thought about ball lightning, but there was no evidence that anything had happened. I called the propane company out the next morning and they told me that the tank wasn't leaking or damaged in any way. The whole event lasted probably 5–10 seconds. I wasn't dreaming, or on any kind of drugs or medication, and I hadn't been drinking either. Has this ever happened to anyone else?

Mike Philips
By email

Swinging light ball

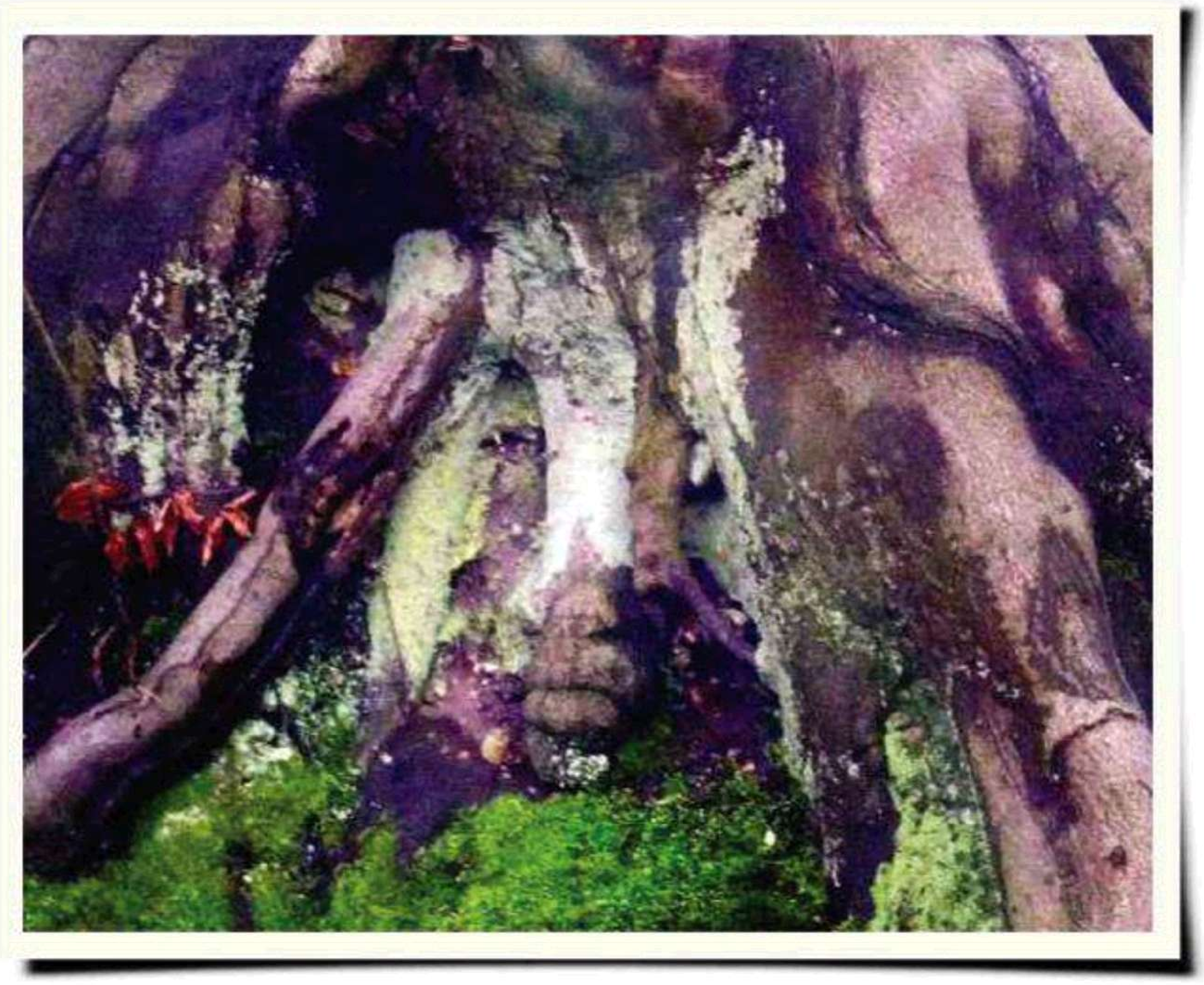
As a child of about eight or nine, I remember looking through the patio windows on a clear summer evening. The swing in the garden was moving and on it was what I can only describe as a white ball of light, moving in unison with the swing. I immediately ran to the back door where my sister and cousin were sitting on the doorstep. I asked if anyone had just been on the swing; they hadn't. I don't remember going to investigate and simply shrugged the matter off. However, now I wish I had gone to investigate.

Matthew Thorley
By email

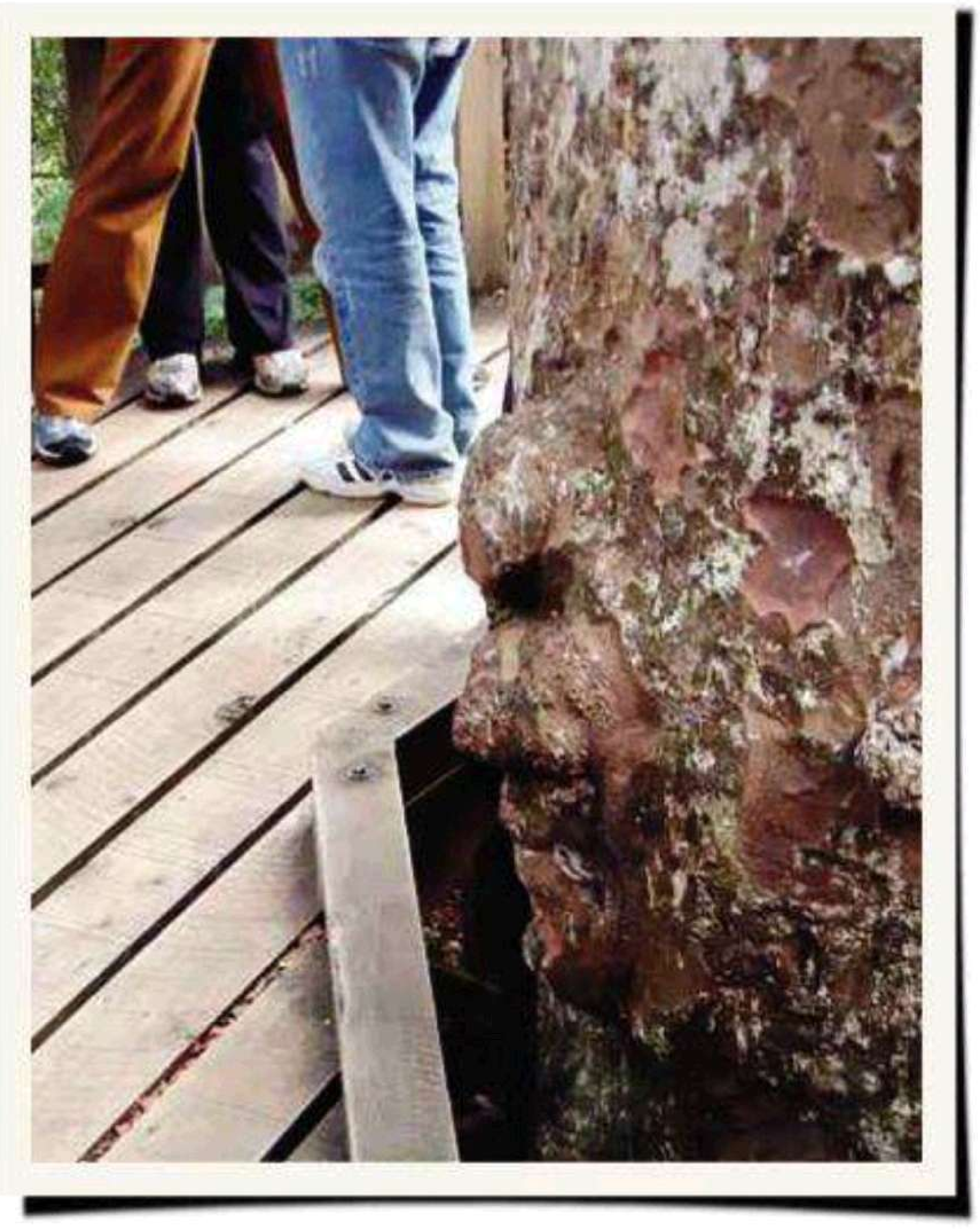
simulacra corner

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London, NW5 4NP, United Kingdom, or to sieveking@forteantimes.com. If your photo is published, we'll send you an exclusive *Fortean Times* gift.

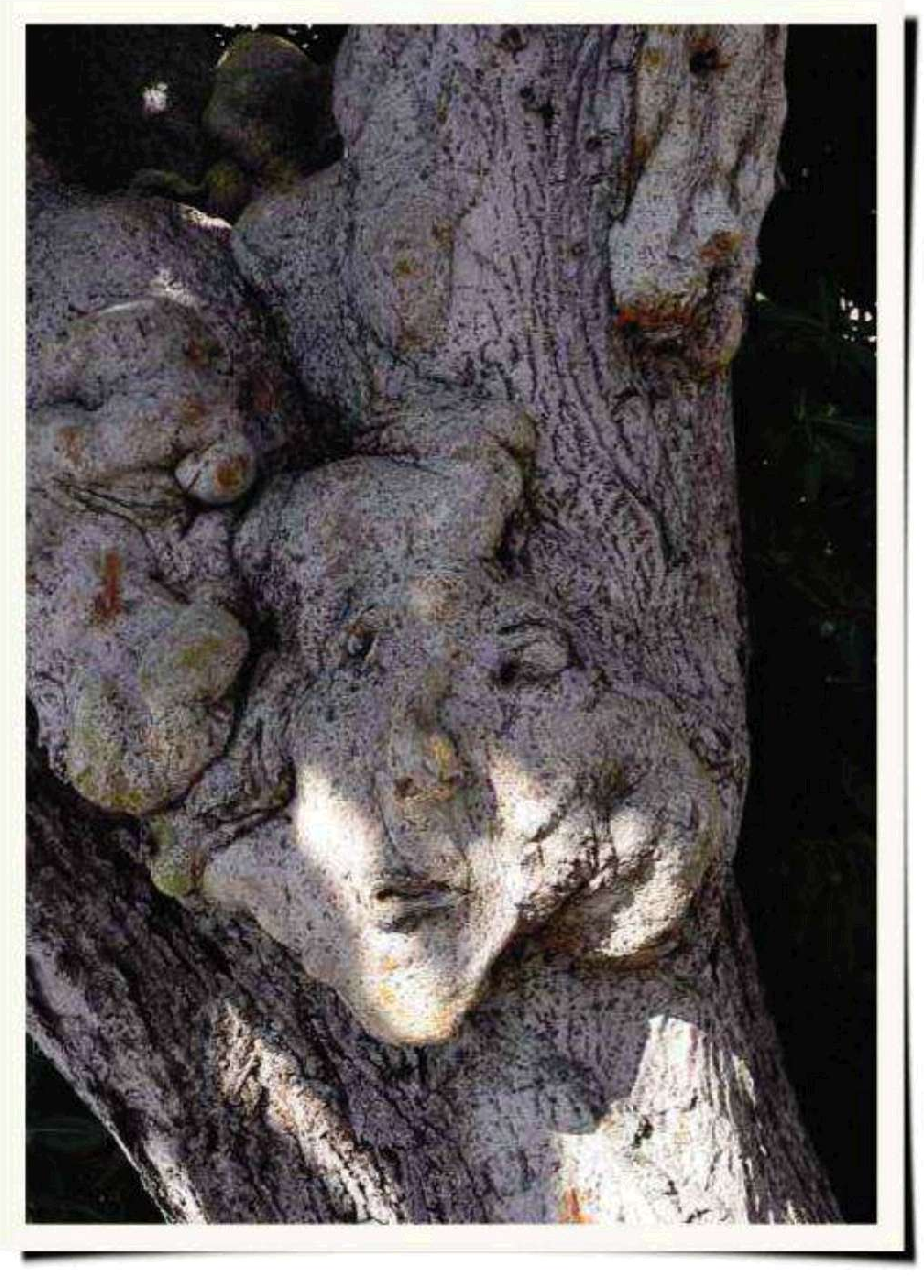
A selection of faces in the trees sent in by FT's observant readers.



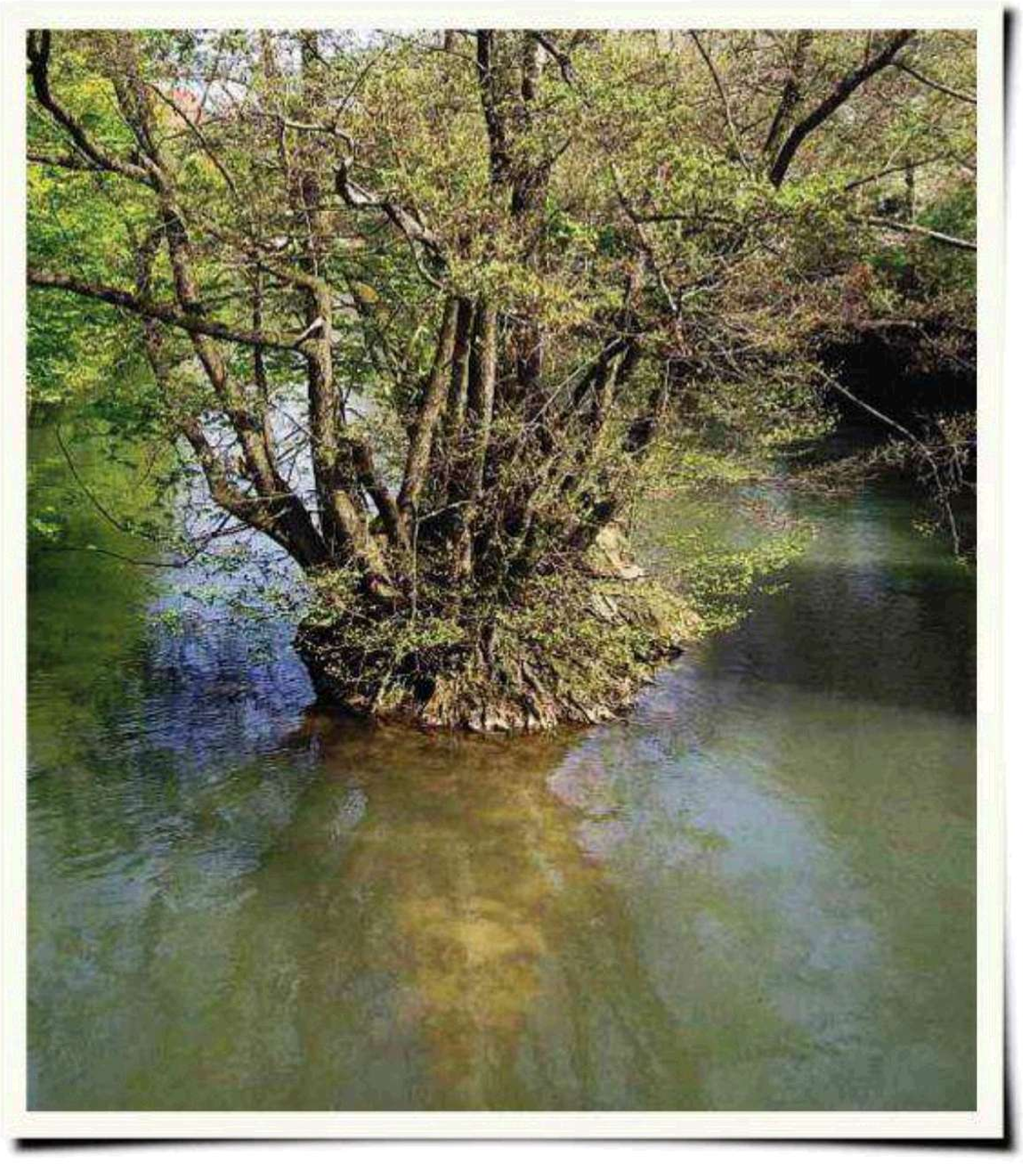
Walking along the Frimley Green to Mytchett stretch of the Basingstoke Canal in Surrey on 27 February 2010, Jo Matthews noticed this 'African' face on a tree.



A face on a tree in Coromandel Forest Park, North Island, New Zealand, photographed by Kyle Peirson, who tells us the walkway was about 8ft (2.4m) off the ground and the tree continued up another 80ft (24m) or so.



While on holiday in 2009, Mark Kirwin saw this face on the trunk of what he thought was an old olive tree, in the little square at the top of a mediæval hilltop village in Provence.



Annie Toase took this photo in Nürnberg in April 2011. In the water below the tree there is a face staring back.

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Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 8 Oct 2011. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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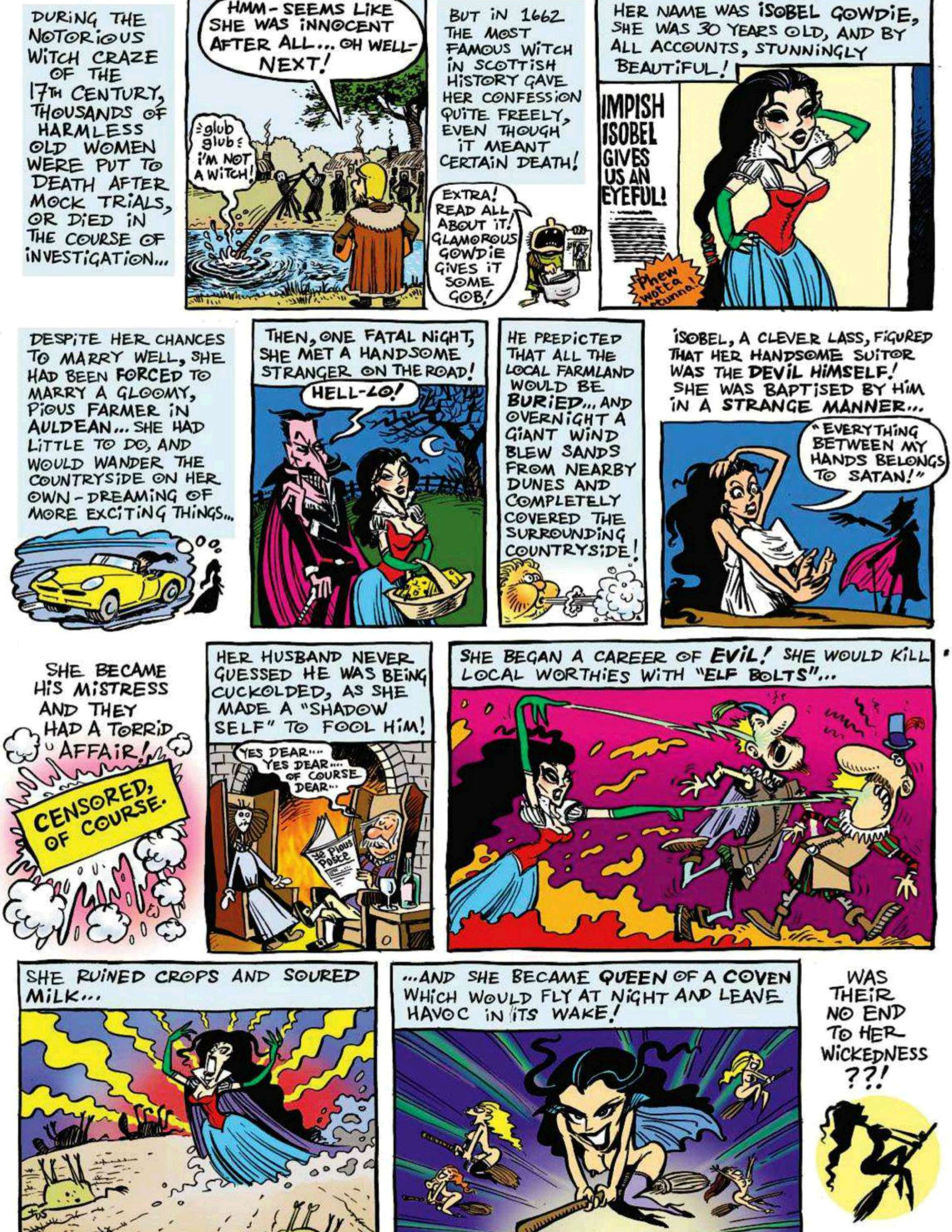
PHENOMENOMIX

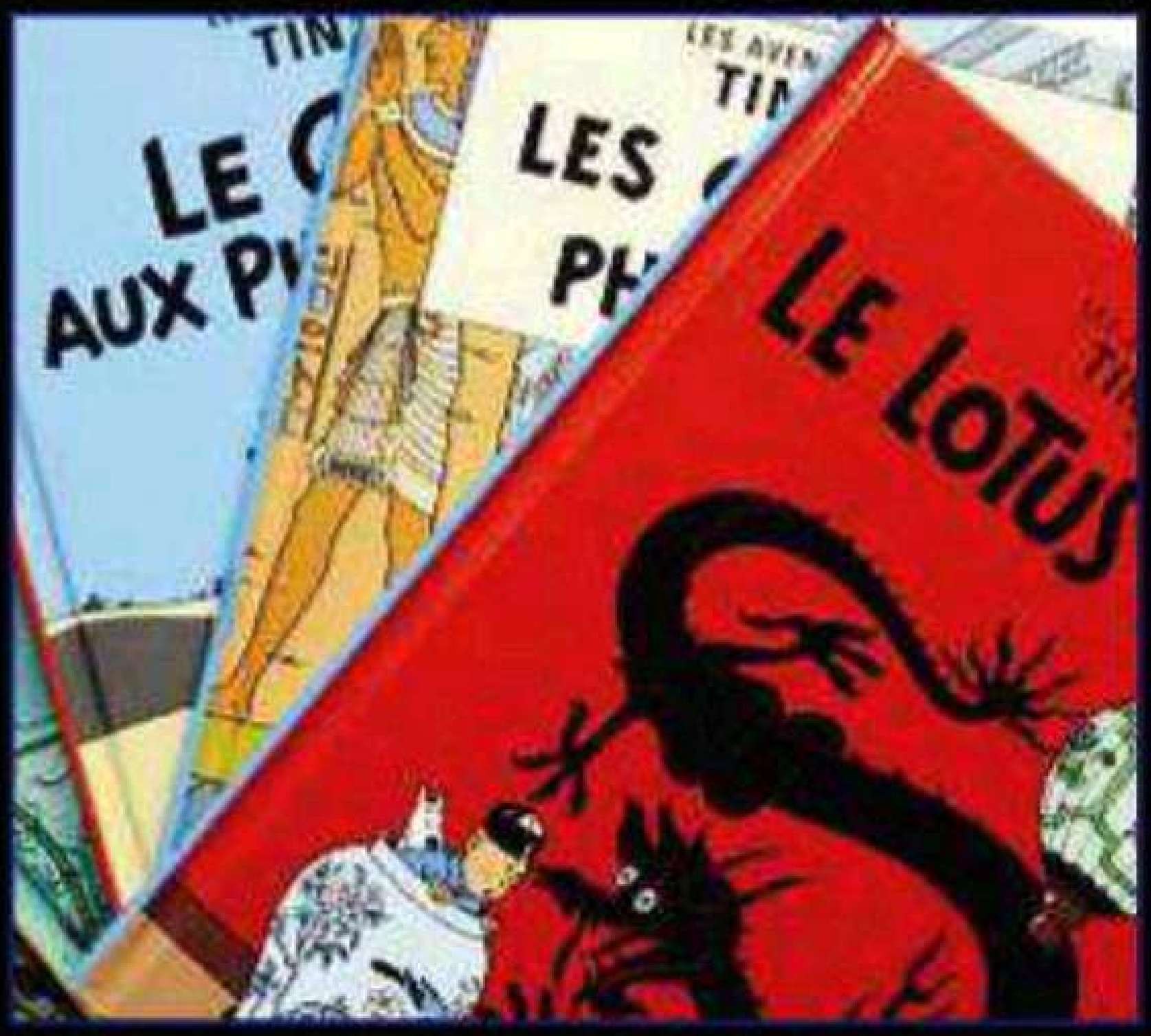
ISOBEL GOWDIE

part 1

HUNT EMERSON and KEVIN JACKSON


DURING THE NOTORIOUS WITCH CRAZE OF THE 17TH CENTURY, THOUSANDS OF HARMLESS OLD WOMEN WERE PUT TO DEATH AFTER MOCK TRIALS, OR DIED IN THE COURSE OF INVESTIGATION...
HMM - SEEMS LIKE SHE WAS INNOCENT AFTER ALL... OH WELL- NEXT!
glub glub - I'M NOT A WITCH!
BUT IN 1662 THE MOST FAMOUS WITCH IN SCOTTISH HISTORY GAVE HER CONFESSION QUITE FREELY, EVEN THOUGH IT MEANT CERTAIN DEATH!
EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT! GLAMOROUS GOWDIE GIVES IT SOME GOB!
HER NAME WAS ISOBEL GOWDIE, SHE WAS 30 YEARS OLD, AND BY ALL ACCOUNTS, STUNNINGLY BEAUTIFUL!
IMPISH ISOBEL GIVES US AN EYEFUL!
Phew wotta stunna!
DESPITE HER CHANCES TO MARRY WELL, SHE HAD BEEN FORCED TO MARRY A GLOOMY, PIOUS FARMER IN AULDEAN... SHE HAD LITTLE TO DO, AND WOULD WANDER THE COUNTRYSIDE ON HER OWN - DREAMING OF MORE EXCITING THINGS...
THEN, ONE FATAL NIGHT, SHE MET A HANDSOME STRANGER ON THE ROAD!
HELL-LO!
HE PREDICTED THAT ALL THE LOCAL FARMLAND WOULD BE BURIED... AND OVERNIGHT A GIANT WIND BLEW SANDS FROM NEARBY DUNES AND COMPLETELY COVERED THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE!
ISOBEL, A CLEVER LASS, FIGURED THAT HER HANDSOME SUITOR WAS THE DEVIL HIMSELF! SHE WAS BAPTISED BY HIM IN A STRANGE MANNER...
"EVERYTHING BETWEEN MY HANDS BELONGS TO SATAN!"
SHE BECAME HIS MISTRESS AND THEY HAD A TORRID AFFAIR!
CENSORED, OF COURSE.
HER HUSBAND NEVER GUESSED HE WAS BEING CUCKOLDED, AS SHE MADE A "SHADOW SELF" TO FOOL HIM!
YES DEAR... YES DEAR... OF COURSE DEAR...
Ye Pious Poste
SHE BEGAN A CAREER OF EVIL! SHE WOULD KILL LOCAL WORTHIES WITH "ELF BOLTS"...
SHE RUINED CROPS AND SOURED MILK...
...AND SHE BECAME QUEEN OF A COVEN WHICH WOULD FLY AT NIGHT AND LEAVE HAVOC IN ITS WAKE!
WAS THEIR NO END TO HER WICKEDNESS ??!
FIND OUT NEXT TIME

COMING NEXT MONTH



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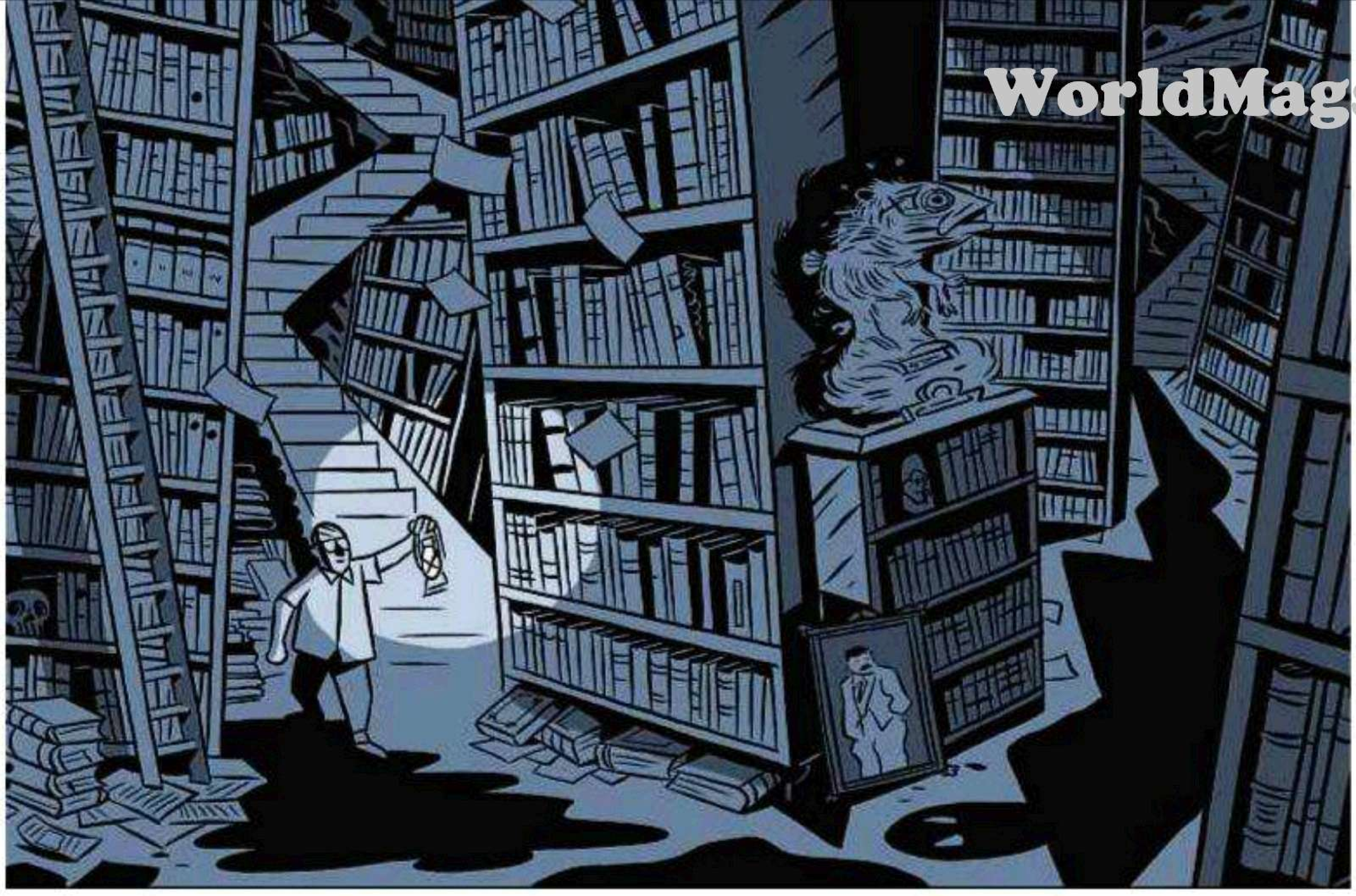

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

OCTOBER 1981

It was an autumn of 'miracles'. A coachload of 54 Spanish pilgrims returning from the Fátima vision site in Portugal might well have had miracles in mind, but what happened was quite unexpected. At some point, it was noticed that their driver, Juan Garcia, was not driving; his head was bowed, eyes closed, and his hands were together in prayer, yet the bus continued cruising at around 50mph (80km/h). A priest among the passengers said that at first there was panic, but it was soon clear that 'something' was in control, as the bus indicated while turning corners and changing gears. For the next 20 miles (32km), Garcia remained in his trance and some passengers said they heard "a sombre voice" issue from him claiming to be the Archangel Michael and that God was driving the bus as a test of faith for Garcia, who, on waking, had no idea what had transpired. The passengers signed an affidavit, which they sent to the Bishop of Leon. At roughly the same time, an apparition of an "olive-skinned Madonna" was seen standing out on the waters of Havana Bay, Cuba; and in western Bosnia and Herzegovina, six girls reported visions of a "golden-haired Madonna", in a field near Citluk, for the fourth consecutive month. This is better known now as the Medjugorje vision site. **FT36:20–21**; **38:20–22**

OCTOBER 1991

In a land famous for its 'rain queens' – a hereditary possession of weather-controlling powers – our own Queen Elizabeth II did well on her visit to Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. In a public address, just as she said "I pray that the drought may soon end and that you have ample rain in the coming year", a heavy downpour began, the first of the season on the parched Matabeleland plains. It is also a tribal tradition that the arrival of a 'big chief' will bring a turn of fortune. In church the next day, the Bishop of St John's Cathedral told the congregation: "She has brought us rain [..] she should stay." As the Queen left, hundreds lining the route chanted: "Stay long, stay long, stay!" **FT60:8**

Curiously, this month, we recorded two ostensions of the famous *Monty Python* 'dead parrot' sketch. Firstly, a male green parrot, a fond pet for 23 years, died when an incompetent vet tried to take a blood sample. When its owner tried to sue for huge damages for the loss of her 'talking' pet, a judge downgraded her claim, asserting the parrot only "articulated sounds similar to those made by people". In Hemel Hempstead, the suitably named Tony Finn bought a basking shark for his large home aquarium. Once in the tank, he noticed it was not moving, so he took it back to the shop for a refund. He was told it was just "neurotic" and sent away. He returned to the shop several more times, again to be rebuffed with more excuses, until the shark inevitably and finally expired. After complaining to a trading standards office, Tony was given a lively tarantula by the shop. **FT63:12**

OCTOBER 2001

In the wake of last month's attack on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the USA was in the grip of an extensive anthrax scare. Within a month, the FBI had received more than 2,000 calls about 'mysterious white powder', most of them turning out to be misidentifications or hoaxes. Similar alarms and evacuations were reported from Canada, Thailand, Japan, Belgium, Kenya, Argentina, Australia, China, Israel, and elsewhere. Seven years later, in 2008, Bruce Ivins, a US government scientist, committed suicide on the eve of being named as the infamous 'Anthrax Bomber' who sent anthrax through the post, causing at least five deaths and sparking the widespread panic. Ivins had worked in US 'biodefense' research laboratories for 18 years, where he prepared anthrax for vaccine experiments. Inevitably, there followed a theory that Ivins had been 'set up'.

Back in October 2001, there was even an 'anthrax virus' doing the rounds on the Internet. The scare also revived anxieties about the infamous 'anthrax terrorist' Larry Wayne Harris, a microbiologist linked to white-supremacist groups, on whom we published a report by conspiracy watcher Kenn Thomas. Harris had previously been jailed for buying freeze-dried bubonic plague bacteria, which prompted new legislation about the possession of biowarfare materials. Harris was jailed again in 1998 for possessing anthrax bacteria (in violation of those new laws) after allegedly threatening to release "military-grade anthrax" in Las Vegas. Harris maintained that this was to draw attention to his belief that Iraq was planning similar attacks on the US. **FT110:46**; **153:7**, **18**

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